A MERCURY PUBLICATION

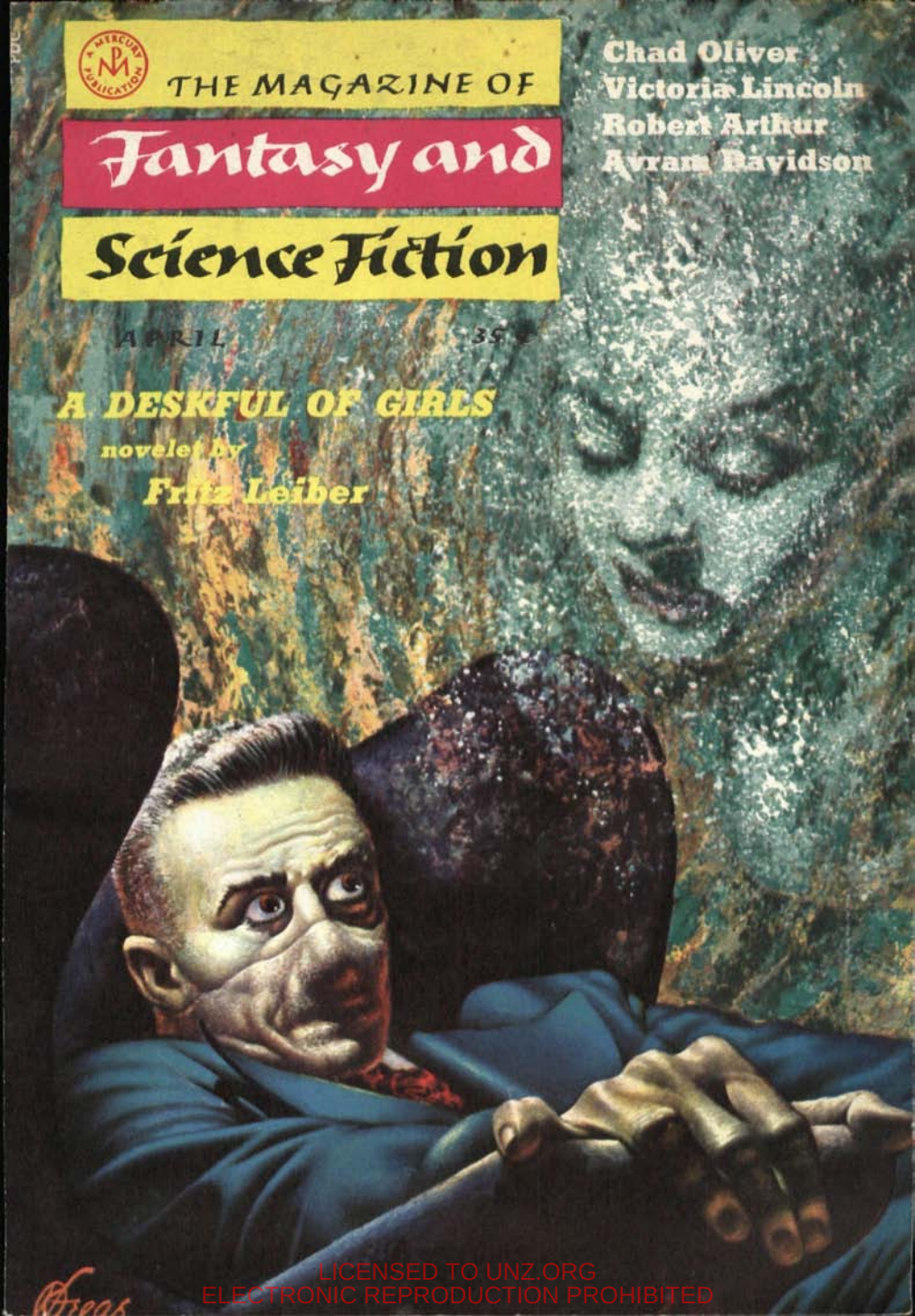
THE MAGAZINE OF

Fantasy and Science Fiction

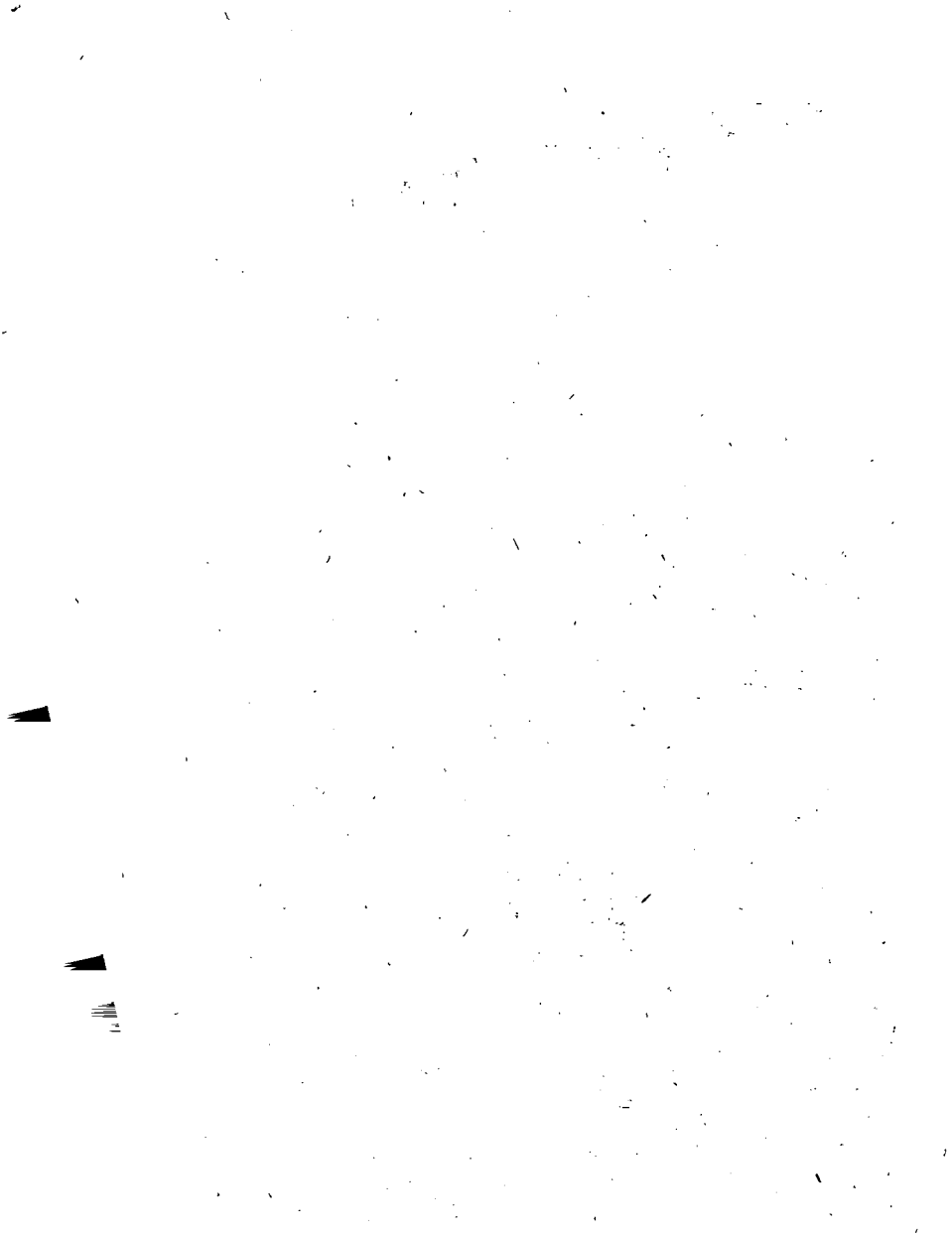
Chad Oliver
Victoria Lincoln
Robert Arthur
Avram Davidson

APRIL 35¢

A DESKFUL OF GIRLS
novelet by
Fritz Leiber



LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED



LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

THE MAGAZINE OF

Fantasy and Science Fiction

VOLUME 14, No. 4 APRIL

Guardian Spirit (*novelet*) *by* CHAD OLIVER 5
The Watchers (*verse*) *by* ANTHONY BRODE 39
Obstinate Uncle Otis *by* ROBERT ARTHUR 40
The Grantha Sighting *by* AVRAM DAVIDSON 48
The Wait *by* KIT REED 56
No Evidence *by* VICTORIA LINCOLN 70
The Death of Each Day *by* IDRIS SEABRIGHT 78
The Witch of Ramoth *by* MARK VAN DOREN 88
Recommended Reading (*a department*) *by* ANTHONY BOUCHER 93
Broken Circuit *by* ARTHUR OESTERREICHER 96
A Deskful of Girls (*novelet*) *by* FRITZ LEIBER 100
Poor Little Warrior! *by* BRIAN W. ALDISS 125

COVER PAINTING BY KELLY FREAS
(*illustrating "A Deskful of Girls"*)

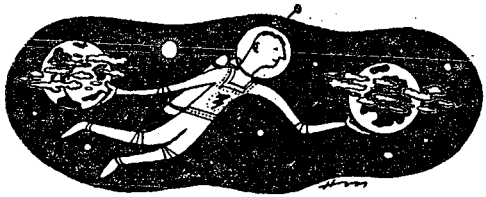
Joseph W. Ferman, PUBLISHER *Anthony Boucher*, EDITOR

The Magazine of Fantasy and Science Fiction, Volume 14, No. 4, Whole No. 83, APRIL, 1958. Published monthly by Mercury Press, Inc., at 35¢ a copy. Annual subscription, $4.00 in U. S. and Possessions, Canada and the Pan-American Union; $5.00 in all other countries. Publication office, Concord, N. H. General offices, 527 Madison Avenue, New York 22, N. Y. Editorial office, 2643 Dana St., Berkeley 4, Calif. Entered as second class matter at the Post Office at Concord, N. H. under the Act of March 3, 1879. Printed in U. S. A. © *1958 by Mercury Press, Inc. All rights, including translation into other languages, reserved. Submissions must be accompanied by stamped, self-addressed envelopes; the Publisher assumes no responsibility for return of unsolicited manuscripts.*

J. Francis McComas, ADVISORY EDITOR *Robert P. Mills*, MANAGING EDITOR
George Salter, ART EDITOR *Norma Levine*, EDITORIAL ASSISTANT

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

BRINGING YOU



TWO WORLDS OF ADVENTURE

ADVENTURE in the here and now, adventure in ages to come on strange, far-off worlds—both are yours to enjoy when you subscribe to Mercury's two outstanding science fiction magazines:

FANTASY AND SCIENCE FICTION—Longtime favorite with science fiction readers, F&SF each month features top-notch tales by the field's best-known writers: Heinlein, Anderson, Asimov, Sturgeon, many others. Plus articles to bring you up to date on s f doings in books, and on the stage and screen.

VENTURE—Science fiction with a flare for the dramatic, the offbeat, the unusual—that's the fare offered by F&SF's new sister magazine. Also, in each bi-monthly issue: Theodore Sturgeon's book reviews, Isaac Asimov's science-in-the-news column.

SPECIAL OFFER: You can now subscribe to both F&SF and VENTURE *at the special rate of $7.00 for 12 issues of each.* Or, if you prefer, single-magazine subscriptions are available at our usual reader-rates. Just fill out the coupon provided below.

Worlds of Adventure MF-Apr-8
Mercury Press, Inc.
527 Madison Ave., New York 22, N. Y.

Please enter my subscription to:

☐ 12 issues of VENTURE Science Fiction ($4.00)
☐ 12 issues of FANTASY AND SCIENCE FICTION ($4.00)
☐ 12 issues of each magazine above (SPECIAL OFFER: $7.00)

☐ I enclose..... ☐ Please bill me.

Name .....
Address .....
City..... *Zone*..... *State*.....

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

In a full meaty novelet of interstellar exploration, anthropologist Chad Oliver takes a long look at a theme that keeps recurring in the thoughts of science fiction writers and (one imagines) of anthropologists: the relation between technological man and primitive man, and the ultimate definition of civilization.

Guardian Spirit

by CHAD OLIVER

THE SMALL GRAY METALLIC SPHERE drifted down through the night sky of Pollux twenty-nine light-years from Earth. The eery pinkish glow of the two moons glinted softly on the floating sphere against its backdrop of silver stars. Already, invisibly far out in space, the ion drive of the mother ship from Earth's CAS fleet had flared into life again, carrying the great ship back into the lonely darkness between the worlds.

The sphere was alone.

It dropped gently through the atmosphere on its antigravs toward the dark surface of the planet below. It made no sound, drifting through the strange moonlight as insubstantially as a ghost from some forgotten world. It hovered above the branches of a stand of trees for a moment, shifted course slightly, and settled in a field of grass and shrubs. It barely disturbed the grass at first and then, as the antigravs shut off, it crushed into the ground with its true weight.

A circular port slid open and two men stepped out. The light from inside the sphere beamed through the port and mixed with the rose of the moonlight. The two men were clearly visible and made no effort to conceal themselves.

Even physically, the two men were a contrast and their first actions on the unknown world merely underlined the differences between them. Arthur Canady, tall and lean and dour, leaned back against the side of the sphere and lit his pipe with hardly a glance at the new world around him. Frank Landis scurried around like a newly-released puppy, his stocky body scuttling back and forth be-

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

tween dimly-glimpsed rocks and shrubs and night-blooming flowers, his sandy hair like a feverish halo over his open, eager face.

"Look at this, Art," he said, retrieving a delicate white flower that looked like an orchid. "How about that? Isn't it something?"

Arthur Canady puffed on his pipe solemnly. "I knew a man once who ate flowers," he said.

"Why'd he do that?" Frank asked, falling into the trap as usual.

"To get to the other side," Arthur Canady explained patiently.

Frank Landis looked at him blankly. "Sometimes I just don't get you, Art."

"I'm not always contagious, I guess."

"I mean, what the *hell*. Here we are, the first civilized men ever to set foot on a new world—it's an historic moment—and you're not even interested."

"I wouldn't say that," Canady said, uncoiling himself from the side of the sphere. "It's just that botany is a little out of my line. For instance, unless you're too set on making a little speech about the Mission from Earth and the Great Terran Father, I suspect that there's something important going on over there right now that we ought to see." He pointed toward the west.

Frank looked and saw nothing. "What's over there?"

"Among other things, if our survey map is accurate, there's a good-sized stream. On the banks of that stream, the natives have a camp —a big one. And they're having a ceremony of some sort."

"What makes you think so?"

"See that glow over there, through those trees? Unless you happen to believe in a horde of giant lightning bugs that means a series of large fires. And if you'll turn up your hearing aid a bit you can hear what sounds like a chant of some kind. Tired hunters aren't very apt to be just practicing their harmony around the old campfire, so I assume there is some type of ceremony going on. And I think we ought to be there."

"Now?" Frank asked.

"Why not?"

Frank stared at his companion. He had never worked with Canaday before and knew him only by his reputation. Dammit, no matter how good an anthropologist he might be, the man wasn't *comfortable*.

"You're not afraid of a few hundred natives, are you?" Canady asked, smiling.

"Of course not! I'm sure you know what you're doing. It's just that — well, we just got here — seems like rushing it a bit . . ."

Canady tapped his pipe out against his boot, carefully smothering the hot ashes with dirt. He had rather suspected that Frank, for all

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

his too-frequent sermons about his love for primitive peoples, preferred to deal with natives from a position of massive strength. Well, he had a point there and this was no time to start a silly argument. "Don't worry, Frank. We'll wait until tomorrow and run through the customary contact routines. I'm just going to sneak over there and have a look through the glasses. You can stay here if you like."

He got his glasses out of the sphere, locating them under Frank's demonstration steam engine, and stuck a pistol in his belt. Then, without another word, he struck off to the west toward the sound of the chanting. He would really have preferred to go alone, to savor this new world without the bubble-bath of Frank's somewhat shrill enthusiasms, but he hadn't gone fifty yards before Frank panted up behind him and fell into step.

"This is really something," Frank exclaimed. "I feel like Robinson Crusoe!"

Canady toyed with a vision of a suitable desert island but held his tongue. His long legs covered the ground with an easy, effortless stride. He felt rather than saw the lovely moons in the star-sprinkled sky, felt the alien wind in his lungs, felt the strange and wonderful sounds and smells and impressions that tugged oddly at his heart.

He entered the darkness beneath the trees, silent as a shadow, and slipped toward the orange glow of the firelight. The chanting was closer now; it had a weird and haunting atonality to it, a subtle rhythm that was hard to catch—

Canady quickened his steps, all thoughts of Frank forgotten. There was a sadness in him, and a nameless hunger.

Twenty-nine light-years from the planet Earth it had begun again.

Hidden in a clump of thorny bushes on a low hill overlooking the stream-cut valley, Arthur Canady held the glasses to his eyes and stared down upon a scene of wild magnificence, a scene that filled him with wonder and the sense of a life beyond his knowledge, a life glimpsed far away, a life he could never enter.

It was something that the survey charts and the planted microphones had not prepared him for. He was a man who was seldom surprised but he was surprised now. It was the difference between a faded photograph and the reality, the difference between a set of statistics and the miracle of human beings. All the expected culture elements were there, but the *intensity* of the thing was astonishing. And there was something more . . .

The stream coursed through the moonlit valley, pink and silver beneath the moons. Tremendous fires blazed along the river banks, hissing and crackling with the rich juices of fresh sap, shooting spectacular showers of sparks high into

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

the air. The orange glow of the flames bathed the rows of tipi-like skin tents in lambent, living light.

There must have been close to a thousand men and women camped by the river, which was an amazing number of people for a hunting culture. Every last person was taking part in the ceremony: dancing, preparing food, singing. They were a tall, robust people; they moved proudly with their heads held high. They were dressed in a wild and barbaric splendor: fur robes and feathers and intricately painted designs on their graceful bodies.

The chanting was continuous. It was a joyful, happy kind of music, serving as a chorus behind the whirling forms of the dancers. Most primitive music, Canady had always felt, was just that: primitive and incredibly monotonous. But this was something else: a lively, complex wave of counterpoint and rhythm that set a man's blood racing in his veins. And the dancing was no mere shuffling of feet in a circle; it was abandoned and yet controlled, graceful as a ballet but with a rough sexuality to it that was strangely innocent, strangely pure.

The happiness and the joy were tangible things; you could feel them in the air. It was a time of rejoicing, a time of release, a time of thanksgiving. And yet there was a dark undercurrent to it, a shadow that moved in and out among the firelit dancers like a whisper of remorse. . . .

In the precise center of the camp one fire blazed higher than all the others. A constant stream of men fed fresh wood to it, tossing mighty logs into the flames. It was a hot, roaring fire, a pivot around which all else revolved. It drew the eye like a magnet.

The two men from Earth lay silent, watching. Both of them knew that they had a once-in-a-lifetime opportunity and they took full advantage of it. Tomorrow their work would begin, the work that would spell the end of the life they were watching, but for now it was only something to see, something to remember when the old days were gone.

The dancing and the chanting continued. It went on for hours, rising in intensity all the time. The dances grew wilder, the chanting rose to a climax that was almost unendurable. The fires blazed and the moons arced across the night sky, shaming the distant light of the stars.

When it happened, it happened with a startling abruptness.

The chanting stopped, as though cut off with a switch. The dancers stopped in mid-step. The natives moved into a silent circle around the central fire. A hush fell over the night, a hush of expectancy. . . .

One man stepped out from the others, framed in the leaping flames. He was naked, free of orna-

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

ment of any kind. He raised his right hand and then his left. He bowed to the four directions. He looked up, out into the night and the moons and the stars. His face was radiant with a supreme peace.

Calmly, without hesitation, he walked into the roaring fire.

He climbed up the searing logs, his hair already aflame. He lay down on his back on a bed of fire. He did not move. He did not cry out. His body disappeared in a mass of flame, even the bones lost in the red-hot coals that fed the fire.

The fire blazed higher, crackling and hissing.

It was done.

The natives turned silently and filed back to their tents by twos and threes. No one looked back at the funeral pyre. Within minutes there was not a human being to be seen anywhere. The stream wound through the valley, gliding smoothly in the fading light. The fires blazed for a remarkably short time, then died away into glowing coals. The great fire that had eaten a life was the last to go, flaring and sparking as though reluctant to give up its moment of splendor, but it finally faded and collapsed into a pile of smoking embers.

The night stole in again, covering the tents with darkness.

The two men from Earth eased themselves out of the concealing bushes and walked back under the stars to their waiting sphere. Even Frank had nothing to say.

Canady felt the strange world around him, felt it as a palpable presence, and was filled with an excitement that had no name. He felt that he stood on the edge of marvels, of wonders that dwelt in an abyss of dreams.

One thing he knew: this was no ordinary hunting culture, no matter what the survey charts showed.

He slept badly, impatient for the morning sun.

II

The sun was a red glory in the sky and by its harsh light the world of Pollux V lost much of its ethereal quality and resolved itself into a matter-of-fact land of rolling plains, distant mountains, and stands of tall trees that followed the river valleys. After a breakfast of concentrated coffee and powdered eggs, Canady found it difficult to recapture his mood of the night before. What he had seen *had* been unprecedented, but perhaps he had attached too much importance to it.

Still, it was odd. The man who had walked into the flames had seemed to do so of his own free will; he had not been forced. He had not been a sacrifice in the usual sense of the word, and in any event human sacrifices were normally a luxury restricted to higher types of culture with larger populations. The man had *wanted* to

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

go into those flames. Why? And why had his death been the occasion for such rejoicing on the part of the rest of the people? There had certainly been more than one band present; people must have come in from miles around to share in the festivities....

Canady shook his head. It was folly to speculate on such things until you knew enough about the culture to make sense of them. He put the incident from his mind and settled into routine.

And routine it was. The first contact between Earth and a primitive culture was always a dramatic event but the procedure was cut and dried. The scientists of Earth's Cultural Aid Service had worked out a plan for every known type of culture and all the field men had to do was to follow the proper plan in simple ABC fashion. All the plans, based on centuries of experience on Earth and on the nearer planetary systems, were designed to do two basic things: show the people that the newcomers were friendly, and show them that they were too powerful to be attacked. It was a neat example of the age-old technique of putting a big smile on your face and carrying a sharp knife in your toga.

While Frank set up his equipment in the sphere, Canady took a high-powered rifle and set out across the plains toward a small herd of grazing animals. The animals (called yedoma in the local native dialect) were large beasts that looked like the American moose, save that the horns on the males were short and stubby affairs like those of domestic cattle. The economic life of the natives—as best the CAS could gather from photographic and microphonic survey—was based on the herds of yedoma that roamed the plains; yedoma meat, fresh or dried, was the food staple, yedoma skins were used for tents and clothing, yedoma sinew was used for thread. It was a neat parallel to the reliance of the ancient Plains Indians upon the buffalo, and it offered an exceptionally easy situation for cultural manipulation.

Canady kept the wind in his face and it was a simple matter to get close enough to the herd for a shot. The animals had had no experience with a weapon that killed at long range and were aware of no danger. Canady dropped a yedoma calf with one shot and could easily have killed half the herd if there had been any point in it. He dragged the calf back to the sphere and lifted it inside.

They were ready.

Frank Landis took the controls and lifted the sphere into the morning sky with the effortless ease of a man to whom all things mechanical were second nature. There was little sensation of movement within the sphere as it floated over

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

the plain toward the native camp.

Canady sat quietly, smoking his pipe. It was crowded inside the sphere, crowded with portable steam engines and sacks of seeds and repeating firearms and that greatest of all invasion threats, crates of sewing machines. He thought of the wild and free scene the night before, the tents and the fires and the dancing, and he thought of it as a way of life already gone, destroyed by the bland deadliness of sacks of seeds and crates of sewing machines. The old regret saddened him, and he was unable to comfort himself by the neat-sounding official phrases that cloaked the operation of the Cultural Aid Service.

In theory, they were helping the natives. The fact that the natives had asked for no help was not mentioned. The speeches at the United Nations were fairly dripping with high-sounding phrases about underdeveloped areas, primitive misery, and the moral obligation of the strong to help the weak. There was much oratory about starving children and the glorious benefits of civilization.

Behind the scenes, oddly enough, much of the talk was along the same lines. All men wear cultural blinkers which condition them to curiously inevitable chains of reasoning. Given certain premises, certain conclusions follow as certainly as fish swallow worms. The goals and aspirations of a man's own culture just naturally seem *right* for all other cultures as well, and surely you are doing the other fellow a service by passing on the joys that you yourself have known. . . .

And then, of course, there *was* the fact that primitive areas make poor markets for an industrial civilization. The development of the ion drive had made trade commercially sound, and Earth's factories were not geared to mass-produce arrow points. If you want to sell a man a tri-di set, it helps to have electricity first. If you want to sell a man a tractor, it is nice if agriculture has already been invented. If you're thinking in terms of consumers, a large and prosperous population is better than a small and poverty-stricken one.

The human mind is infinitely capable of rationalization; it can justify anything from crusades to slavery on the basis of Good, Pure, and Noble Motives.

Canady had never considered himself a romantic man. He was a product of his culture and he had to live in it. He had found a job that interested him, a job that offered good pay and prestige, and he did his job honestly. But he had never been able to convince himself that he was a knight in shining armor by reciting a string of platitudes. He was too wise a man to believe that he could change the universe by a one-man fight against injustice, so he simply did

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

what men have always done—he did the best he could to ease some of the pain along the way.

Right now, as the sphere floated over the tree-tops, he was not unduly proud of himself. Even the argument that he was gaining valuable data for his science failed to reassure him, and it was a mark of his honesty that he did not even consider the argument that if he didn't do the job somebody else would.

Frank looked up from the controls, his blue eyes disturbed. He was not an insensitive man and many of the same thoughts had been bothering him. Frank, however, could always sell himself on the rightness of what he was doing. It was not dishonesty on his part; his brain just worked that way.

"Seems kind of a shame," he said. "I guess they like their life pretty well the way it is."

"Maybe not," Canady said, helping him out. "After all, Frank, that's an argument that might have kept us all in the caves."

"That's right." Frank's eyes brightened. "Hell, if you don't believe in *progress,* what can you believe in?"

Canady could think of several answers to that one but he just shrugged as though the problem were insoluble. The blind faith in progress—which normally, if you tried to pin it down to anything approaching preciseness, meant increased technological complexity—was so deeply ingrained in Earth's cultures that it had become an automatic response. Even children believed in progress. How could you not believe in progress?

"I look at it this way," Frank said slowly. "We're taking something away from them, sure. We're asking them to change their way of life on a purely voluntary basis—we're not *forcing* them to do anything. In return, we're offering them things they've never had before: comfort and good health and security. What's wrong with that?"

"Your insight is very comforting," Canady said without smiling. "Got the bomb ready?"

Frank looked at him sharply, disturbed by the juxtaposition of the two sentences. Canady, however, smoked his pipe without expression. "It's ready."

Canady studied the terrain below in the viewers. They were over a cleared area near the native camp. He checked the safety detectors. There were no people in the target area, but it was close enough so that they could get an eyeful.

"Let go the convincer," he said.

Frank tripped the switch and the bomb fell. It went off with a satisfying bang and set off a cloud of smoke out of all proportion to any damage it might have done. It was not atomic, of course. There was no need to use a block-buster when a firecracker would serve.

"Set her down," he said.

Frank jockeyed the sphere into

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

position above the rows of skin tents and landed it in the precise center of the camp. They waited until the natives had had time to form a cautious circle around them and then they opened the port.

The two men from Earth stepped out, smiles on their faces and their right hands raised in gestures of peace.

Canady's troubled green eyes took in the whole works with one swift, experienced glance. Anthropologists who have spent long years in the field tend to be more impressed with the similarities between cultures than with their obvious differences. It is only the untrained eye that seizes upon the somewhat superficial oddities and cannot see beyond the seemingly bizarre to the deeply-rooted universals that underlie all human social systems. A nomadic hunting culture *has* to have certain characteristics for the excellent reason that it will work in no other way. This, as Canady was well aware, is just as true twenty-nine light-years from Earth as it was in aboriginal Asia, Africa, or North America. A scientific law is binding no matter where you find it.

He saw a great deal in that one quick check. He saw not only the scene before him but saw it projected against a backdrop of facts and figures, saw it neatly divided up into familiar categories. Even if he had not already known a great deal about the natives from the planted microphones that had enabled him to learn the language, he could have predicted rather closely what these people would be like. Now as always in the moment of initial contact, he was on the alert for anything off-key, anything that didn't fit. It was the unexpected that could make for trouble.

At first, he saw nothing unusual. The natives stood in a loose circle, waiting. There were fewer of them now than there had been the night before; obviously the other bands had dispersed after the ceremony. Canady estimated the crowd at about sixty-five men and women. They were a tall, healthy-looking group with that robustness of bone and muscle that comes from an outdoor life and a predominantly meat diet. The men were dressed in skin leggings and had ornate bone combs stuck into their long dark hair. The women wore a simple skin tunic, tied at the waist with beaded thongs.

Canady spotted his first oddity: none of the natives was carrying a weapon of any kind. He filed the fact away.

Canady lowered his hand. "We visit The People in peace," he said loudly in the native language. "We come among The People as friends. We come from the sky to bring honor to the Old Ones and many gifts to The People."

Precisely on cue, Frank dragged

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

the yedoma calf out of the sphere and placed it on the ground before the natives. There was a low murmur from the people. A man stepped forward, his dark bronzed skin glistening in the sun. He was dressed exactly like the rest except that his head-comb was blue rather than white. He raised his right hand. "You are welcome among The People," he said quietly. "We thank you for your gift. Our food is your food, and our camp your camp."

It was all according to formula but Canady felt again the stirrings of uneasiness. The natives were too calm, too self-assured. Surely the bomb had had *some* effect....

"We bring not only friendship to The People," he said. "We bring many useful gifts to make your days easier. We bring a hunting stick that kills with a sound like thunder."

Frank stepped out again with a repeating rifle in his hand. He lifted the weapon to his shoulder, took aim on a small tree, and fired six shots in rapid succession. The trunk of the tree splintered neatly and a fragment of bark fell to the ground. The staccato sound of the shots died away and there was silence.

The natives watched impassively, giving him their courteous attention. They were neither frightened nor impressed.

Canady finished his speech rather lamely. "It is our hope that this day will mark the beginning of a long friendship between The People and our own people. It is our hope that the Old Ones will look with favor upon our visit, and that we may each learn many things."

The native with the blue comb nodded. He waited to make sure that Canady had finished speaking, and then stepped forward and took his arm. He smiled, showing fine, even teeth. "Come," he said. "You must be tired and hungry after your journey through the sky. Let us eat of the yedoma and talk to one another as men."

Canady hesitated, more and more unsure of himself. The *tone* of the thing was completely wrong. It was not that the natives were unfriendly, but there was certainly none of the usual gods-from-the-sky business. It was almost as though The People had visitors from space every day in the week. He looked at Frank out of the corner of his eye. Frank was smiling, still playing the Great White Father role.

"Bring the rifle," he said in English.

The native turned and led the way toward his splendidly painted tent. Canady and Frank walked along behind him. The native men and women watched them with no great interest and then went about their business.

"Well, I'll be damned," Canady said.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

"This is really something," Frank whispered.

"It's something right enough," Canady agreed. "But what the devil *is* it?"

He followed the native into the tent, and he sensed once more that he stood on the edge of marvels, of wonders that dwelt in an abyss of dreams....

The days that followed were easily the strangest of Canady's life. Psychologically, it is never a simple matter for a man to be uprooted from all that is familiar to him and set down in a way of life that is not his own. Previously, though, in his work in the Alpha Centauri system, Canady had at least been supported by the knowledge that his task was going well, that the situation was fully under control. And Dave, who had shared those years with him, had been much more of a friend than Frank Landis could ever be.

Canady had never felt so utterly alone. Even in his troubled adolescence in New Chicago he had had understanding parents who gave him an anchor in a bustling world. Later, there had been a series of women—though he had never married—and the quiet contentment of summers in the unspoiled national forests of Colorado. His interest in his work had sustained him when all else failed, and now even his confidence in his knowledge was shaken.

It was made all the more difficult by the fact that there was nothing wrong with The People that he could put his finger on. There were no signposts erected in the village that advertised BIG MYSTERY HERE. The People were friendly enough in their fashion and they were more than willing to cooperate. They did all the things that they were supposed to do. The men rode out of the camp on their camel-like mharus in hunting parties, searching for the grazing herds of yedoma which they brought down with their bows and arrows. The women cooked and worked long hours in preparing skins and gathering wild plants from the river valleys. Often, at night while the two moons sailed among the stars, stories were told around the campfires, stories of the Old Ones and the Long Walk and the heroic deeds of the warriors of The People.

It was all very normal on the surface. But the nuances were all wrong, completely beyond Canady's understanding. The grace notes of the culture were subtly alien in a way he could not fathom. Frank was merely puzzled and a little hurt by the reception given to his bag of tricks, but Canady was deeply disturbed.

He tried to drive a wedge of understanding into the culture by falling back on the most reliable of all techniques. He began by employing the genealogical method, a

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

safe introductory gambit for centuries. He sat down with Plavgar, the blue-combed native who seemed to have the high status of a headman. He asked him all the innocuous, surefire questions. What was the name of his wife? What had been the names of her parents? What had been the names of his parents? What were the names of their children, if any? This sort of thing was practically guaranteed to set any native off on a long chain of reminiscences about his family for generations back, and in the process the anthropologist could gain a valuable key to the various kinship connections that were so important in a primitive society. Plavgar, however, simply did not respond. He gave his wife's name, and explained that she had been obtained by raiding a neighboring band. He gave the name of his father and mother—and then proceeded to name almost everyone in the band, calling them all father and mother, and offering to introduce them to Canady. The idea of brothers and sisters appeared to puzzle him. As for generations past, he was a complete blank. Since peoples without a means of writing always made a point of remembering relatives to a really amazing degree, this was manifestly impossible.

He did get a typical culture hero story, about a man who had led an almost legendary mharu raid against the Telliomata, swiping their entire mharu herd from right under their eyes. But then Plavgar blandly offered to introduce Canady to the culture hero, who could be seen at that moment calmly gnawing on a steak in front of his tipi.

Frank set up his steam engine and showed The People the work it could do. They watched the demonstration politely, as one might watch a child putting together a model airplane, and then ignored it. Frank got out his battery-powered sewing machines and played his trump card. He took the women aside and showed them how they could cut their work-day in half. The women tried it out, smiling and eager to please, and then went back to their bone needles.

Even the rifles, so demonstrably superior to the native bows and arrows, failed to have the desired effect. The natives admired Frank's shooting and that was all. This was a serious business, because the rifle was a lever that the men from Earth had relied heavily upon. Once you substituted rifles for bows in a hunting culture you had a ready-made market. Not only would the natives become so dependent on the rifles that they would in time forget how to make bows, but the introduction of the rifle would set off a chain reaction that would completely upset the balance of power between the native groups. A band with rifles

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

was unbeatable. Then, the mere threat of taking the rifles away or withholding ammunition was all the threat you needed....

Try as he might, Canady could get no information about shamans. At first, he put this down to an understandable tabu against referring to the supernatural. But the natives did not shy away from his questions: they simply assured him that they didn't *have* any curers or healers or medicine men. He got a lot of patient talk about the Old Ones, and that was that. He shook his head. He had never heard of a primitive culture without shamans—it was as unthinkable as a copter without an atmosphere. What did they do when they got sick?

It was not until he had been on the planet for two full months that the truth hit him in the face, the truth that should have been obvious from the first. It was so simple, so utterly out in the open, that its significance had completely escaped him. And it was so fantastic that the very idea was automatically rejected by the mind.

It all began when Lerrie, the wife of Rownar, announced that she was pregnant.

III

A fever pitch of excitement ran through the camp of The People and Canady found himself caught up in it despite himself. He had lived long enough to know that true happiness was the rarest of all gifts and the natives around him were almost delirious with joy. Even the certain knowledge that he was on the verge of a tremendous scientific discovery paled to insignificance. There was a smile on every face and work was impossible. A sense of miraculous well-being permeated the very air. It was a holiday mood and Canady surrendered to it.

The People had stayed long in one place and it was time to move on. The warm summer months were fading into the chill of autumn and the yedoma herds were migrating to the south across the grassy, rolling plains. The People would have had to follow them in any case, but it was definitely the news about Lerrie that triggered their departure.

The great tents were struck and the hides were lashed to pack mharus. The tent poles were tied to the flanks of the beasts so that their tips dragged along the ground. The tips were securely lashed together, travois-fashion, to form a **V**-shaped platform upon which The People placed their few belongings. The men and women mounted their mharus and they were ready. Leaving home was as simple as that.

The People moved out at dawn on a cold, gray day. A light rain was falling and the yedoma robes were welcome against their

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

shoulders. Canady, moved by an impulse he hardly understood, rode with the natives. His camel-like mharu was a spirited mount and he felt oddly at peace on the scrap of hide that served as a saddle. His tall, lean body had grown hard in his months with The People and the wind-swept rain in his face was fresh and cool, the breath of life itself.

Dammit, he thought, *I feel like a man again.*

Frank followed along behind the tribe, piloting the sphere. He held it just above the level of the grass and its soundless presence was curiously unreal. The People ignored it and whenever Canady glanced back and saw it hovering over the plain behind him he felt a wild urge to laugh. The thing was somehow comical, for all the engineering skill that had gone into it. When compared with the magnificent vitality of the world around it the sphere became a kind of cipher, colorless and blatantly trivial. It seemed to sail along in a void, trying without success to attract attention to itself. It was a loud-shirted tourist in a forest of cool pines and it didn't matter, it was overwhelmed....

A day and a night and a day The People rode. They did not seem to hurry and they dozed in their saddles and chewed on dried meat and berries as they traveled but there was a definite direction to their wandering. They crossed the windy plains and struck a trail that wound up into the foothills of a range of purple, snow-capped mountains. They rode into a sheltered canyon where a small stream trickled out of a glacial spring, a canyon where the trees were tall and dark and green. They moved through the evening shadows, pitching their tents and building great yellow fires that warmed the chill air.

Canady was sore and red-eyed from lack of sleep. The trick of dozing in the saddle looked easy enough when the natives did it, but he had discovered that the jerky gait of the mharu was anything but soothing. He decided that perhaps the rugged outdoor life was not an unalloyed joy after all and stumbled into the sphere with relief. The warm, dry bunk pulled him like a magnet and he fell into it without bothering to take off his damp, dirt-streaked clothes.

Frank, neat and clean and freshly-shaven, wrinkled his nose. "You smell like a fertilizer factory, my friend," he said. "Remember, I live here too."

"Make yourself at home," Canady said. He yawned, too tired to argue. "Call me early, will you? I have a feeling that something's going to pop, and I don't want to miss it."

Frank said something else, then looked more closely at his companion and gave up. Canady was

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

already snoring lustily. Frank smiled and managed to haul off the sleeping man's boots, which he held at arms-length and deposited outside on the ground. He gently placed a blanket over Canady's body and sat down to write up his field notes for the day.

He shook his head. Canady was a funny guy.

Outside in the night, a single voice was raised in a plaintive chant. It was a woman's voice, soft and lovely in the silence. Frank listened to it for a long time and then he too went to bed.

The woman chanted on, her voice liquid and true, and it was hard to tell whether it was a song she sang, or a prayer....

The next day dawned clear and cold with a thin wind whining down from the mountain snows. The sheltered valley, dark with tall fir trees, was slow to warm and the tipis of The People stood like frozen sentinels on the canyon floor.

Arthur Canady stood surveying the scene, his long legs wide apart, his work-roughened hands on his hips. There was a respectable black beard on his face and he had let his hair grow long. He shivered a little in the cold and tried to determine his next move. There was no doubt that they had failed utterly in their mission to date; the natives had shown no interest at all in the fancy gadgets they had brought from Earth. This didn't bother Canady—in fact it gave him a secret satisfaction—but what did bother him was the fact that after months with The People he was still a stranger. He felt a keen sense of not belonging, of being an outsider. He had made no friends and this had never happened to him before. The People were not hostile and they treated him with every courtesy, but they did not *accept* him.

That hurt.

He walked along the line of tipis, smelling the rich odors of yedoma steaks broiling over the cook-fires. He saw Lerrie, the wife of Rownar, washing her face in the cold waters of the mountain stream. She looked up at him and smiled. She looked radiantly beautiful as though filled with an inner joy that stamped itself upon her every feature. Her eyes sparkled in the morning sunlight. She shook the water from her face and began to comb out her long black hair.

"Good morning," he said.

"It is a lovely morning, Arthur." It was odd to hear his name on her lips and the sound of his name took on a strange music.

"The Old Ones have been kind," he said, following the formula. "I rejoice for you."

She smiled again. "I am to be a mother," she said, as though this were the most wonderful thing in the world. "I, Lerrie, am to have a child!"

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

"That is good." Canady hesitated, searching for the right words. "It is your first?" he asked.

She stared at him and then laughed aloud. "My first! Surely you are joking with me? Of course it is my first. How could it be otherwise?"

"Forgive me; many of your customs are still strange to me. Lerrie, in my world it is sometimes dangerous to ask a woman how old she is. Do you mind if I ask you? How old are you, Lerrie?"

She frowned as though puzzled. "How . . . *old*?"

"How many seasons have you lived?"

She shook her head. "I do not know," she said simply. "We do not count such things. I am alive. That is all."

"Many seasons?" Canady persisted.

"Yes, Ar-thur. Many seasons."

"Do you remember when you were a child, Lerrie?"

She pursed her lips. "It was long ago. I remember little." Her face brightened. "I do remember the Coming of Age, when I became one of The People. I will never forget that. I was so frightened. I had heard stories of the Long Walk, even then." She paused. "My child will be a good child, Ar-thur. He will have a good heart."

"I'm sure he will, Lerrie." He looked at the woman before him. She was hardly more than a girl. By Earthly standards she could not have been more than twenty-five years old. And yet she could not remember her childhood.

She had lived—how long?

Many seasons.

"I rejoice for you," he said again, and walked on to find Plavgar, the headman of The People. He found him sitting cross-legged in his tipi while his wife busied herself mending clothing. Canady was invited inside and seated himself on Plavgar's right, which he knew was proper etiquette for a guest. He said nothing until Plavgar's comely wife had served him a wooden bowlful of stew, which he dutifully sampled.

"Please smoke if you wish," Plavgar said. "I have noticed that it makes you more comfortable."

Canady pulled out his pipe, filled it, and lit it with a burning stick from the fire. The inside of the tipi was surprisingly roomy and spotlessly clean. The ground was covered with yedoma skins and the air smelled sweet and fresh. Canady took his time, puffing on his pipe. Plavgar sat quietly, watching him. He was a man of great dignity but except for the blue comb in his hair there was nothing about him to show his office of leader. He was still a young man in the prime of life, and yet his bearing was that of a man who had lived long and thought of many things.

"May I ask you some questions?" Canady said slowly.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

Plavgar smiled. "That is your custom."

Canady flushed faintly. "I am sincere in wanting to know about The People. There are many things that I do not understand. As I stay with you longer, I find that I know less and less."

"That is the beginning of wisdom, my son." It was the first time that Plavgar had ever called him son and it pleased Canady. Of course, he himself was thirty-five, older than Plavgar looked, but the term seemed fitting.

"Do I have your permission to ask you anything I wish?"

Plavgar nodded, a faint twinkle in his eyes. "We have no secrets. I will help you all I can."

Canady leaned forward. "What happens to the children of The People?" he asked.

Plavgar frowned. "What happens to them? Why, they grow up into adult members of the tribe."

"They *always* grow up into adult members of the tribe?"

"Almost always. When a child is born he must learn many things. He must live among The People and learn their ways. If he has a good heart, he is sent out alone to Thunder Rock, high in the mountains. There he fasts for four days and there the Old Ones send a guardian spirit to him. He sees the guardian spirit and they become one. Then he goes through the Coming of Age, and he is one of The People forever."

"And if he does *not* have a good heart?"

"That does not often happen, my son. If he does not have a good heart, if he does not believe in the ways of The People, then the Old Ones are sad and will not accept him. His guardian spirit does not come to Thunder Rock and he is alone. If he has no guardian spirit, it would be unthinkable for him to take part in the Coming of Age."

"What happens to him?"

"He takes the Long Walk."

"You mean—he is expelled from the tribe?"

"He was never one of The People. He takes the Long Walk alone. He is alone forever or until his heart is good. A man cannot be a man until his heart is good."

Canady kept his face expressionless. His profession had taught him patience, if nothing else. It was always like this: the answers freely given that explained nothing. The guardian spirit complex was a familiar one, of course; it was the idea of a personal vision that came after fasting, a contact with the supernatural that gave a man a kind of personal phantom ally that accompanied him through life. If you were told throughout your childhood that you would see a spirit on Thunder Rock, and if you went without eating for four days alone in the mountains, you would see a spirit right enough. Particularly if you could not gain

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

admission into adult status in the tribe if you did *not* see a spirit. Still—

"I have heard much of the Old Ones. Can you tell me about them?"

"The Old Ones lived in the world before men came," Plavgar said, as though instructing a small child. "They were mighty beings and they live still in the high places. We cannot see them in our day-to-day life, but they are always there. They show themselves to us on Thunder Rock if we have a good heart. The Old Ones watch over our people and protect us from harm. The lives of the Old Ones and those of The People are one. We live together in harmony, and each is a part of the other."

That tells me exactly nothing, Canady thought.

He tried to bring the conversation down to a more concrete level. "Why is it that I have seen no children among The People?" he asked.

Plavgar smiled. "They have all grown up. The children are The People now."

Swell.

"And Lerrie?"

"The Old Ones have been kind. We rejoice for her, and we are thankful to Mewenta." Plavgar eyed him shrewdly. "You will stay with us long, my son?"

"Perhaps." The mother ship was due to pick them up twenty-two terrestrial months from now.

"Then you shall see for yourself what happens to the children of The People." Plavgar's face glowed. It seemed to be impossible for any native to refer to the coming child without a kind of inner ecstasy. "The Old Ones have been kind!"

"I rejoice with you," Canady said politely. There was a question nagging at him, something about what Plavgar had said. He tried to put his finger on it and failed. There were so many strange things—

He stood up. "I thank you for your time, Plavgar."

"I hope I have helped you," the headman said.

I hope so too, Canady thought, feeling far from certain.

He took his leave and went back to the sphere to dictate the text of his conversations with Plavgar and Lerrie.

All that afternoon, while Frank was busy trying to interest someone in his sewing machines, Canady puzzled over the data he had obtained. He felt that he had at least made some progress: he could pinpoint the areas in the culture that were causing the trouble. He could ask the right questions, and he knew that the answers were only a matter of time.

He smoked his pipe thoughtfully and as he worked he sensed a growing excitement within him. Approached solely as a puzzle, The People were more intriguing than any culture he had ever encoun-

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

tered. And if his hunch was right—

Looked at on a superficial level there was nothing at all extraordinary about The People. They formed a small hunting society based on the yedoma, they lived in tipis, they told stories about the Old Ones and believed in personal guardian spirits. There was nothing obviously wrong. But—

Item: None of the Earth's techniques for manipulating the culture had had the slightest effect. The culture was stable beyond belief. They not only had no interest in technology as such—they actively opposed any technological change. They wanted to keep their way of life the way it was. This was frequently the case in areas like social organization and religion, but Canady had never heard of a group that would not take to firearms and sewing machines like ducks to water. It was as though The People *knew* that the introduction of new technological elements would inevitably change their total way of life.

Item: Lerrie looked like a young girl. Yet she could not remember her childhood. She had no idea how old she was. And the notion of having more than one child had struck her as being ridiculous.

Item: There were no old individuals among The People. Canady had not seen a single person who looked over thirty. Even the leaders like Plavgar were young men.

Item: There were no children among The People. At first, Canady could hardly credit this, but there could be no doubt of it now. There were no babies, no adolescent boys and girls. Lerrie's pregnancy was a great event. Her child would be the only one in the tribe. . . .

Item: There were no shamans. There were no techniques for dealing with sickness.

What did it all add up to?

Suddenly, Canady remembered the phrase of Plavgar's that had troubled him when he first heard it. What had Plavgar said?

"We rejoice for her, and we are thankful to Mewenta."

Mewenta? But the husband of Lerrie was named Rownar. Who was Mewenta, and what did he have to do with the coming birth of Lerrie's child?

Canady snapped his fingers. Of course! He knew who Mewenta had to be, and that meant—

He got to his feet, the blood racing in his veins. He hurried outside into the twilight shadows. He knew the question now. It was time to get an answer.

Canady soon found that it was easier to determine upon a course of action than to carry it out. He had worked over his data longer than he had thought and twilight was already deepening into night when he tried to find Plavgar for another conference.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

He found him quickly enough but Plavgar was busy.

The hunters had all come in, loaded down with yedoma meat, and smooth firm-fleshed fish had been taken from the mountain streams. The women had prepared the evening meal and built up the fires against the night. The People had gathered in knots around the fires and Canady saw at once that there was some kind of ceremony going on.

It was not the sort of thing that a man could interrupt gracefully. Canady stayed in the shadows and watched.

It was a curious ritual, a mixture of wild abandon and solemn, highly stylized movements that were as old as time and performed with an immemorial artistry. There was a definite rhythm to the ritual, but it was a rhythm of motion rather than of music; no instruments were used and the only sounds came from cadenced human voices.

The women sat in groups of four around the fires. In the center of the camp, dressed in a long blue tunic, Lerrie stood on a low platform of logs. Her skin gleamed like gold in the firelight and her long black hair glistened around her shoulders. She turned slowly on the platform, facing each group of women in turn. There was a happiness in her eyes that was good to see.

The men danced in a great circle around Lerrie, their deep voices chanting a song that was old when the very mountains were young. Every few minutes one man would detach himself from the circle and visit each of the woman-fires. At each fire he would raise his bare arms and address the women in a ritual speech. He would tell of the events of his life, taking care to mention the incidents he had shared with each woman, and then give an account of his personal exploits: coups he had counted on raiding parties, his moment of contact with his guardian spirit, stories of Long Walks and Old Ones. When he had completed the circle of the fires, he would choose one woman for his ceremonial mate and take her into the trees beside the mountain stream. After a time, the two of them would come back to the fires, the woman would seat herself in her group of four, and the man would resume his place in the circle. As far as Canady could determine, the only rule was that a man could not choose his own wife.

Canady watched in silence, feeling far more than a scientific interest in the proceedings. He felt desperately alone, desperately out of things, like a penniless child with his face pressed tight against the cold window of a toy shop. He stood in the shadows of the firelight, half in darkness and half in light, and he chewed on the stem of his pipe with a longing and

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

bitterness that racked his soul. The stars were frozen above him, the night was chill, and he had been long without a woman....

The tireless chant continued and The People filled the darkness with their rejoicing. Only Lerrie was alone, and no man touched her. She stood smiling on the log platform, radiantly lovely with the new life that was stirring within her. Canady felt a strange kinship with her, the kinship of the outsiders, but he resented her too. She was the center of everything, and he simply did not count.

He shook his head. This was a hell of a time for self-pity.

He waited until dawn streaked the sky with gray, waited until he could sense the great red sun hovering beneath the mountain horizon. When the ceremony was over and The People were laughing and talking together in normal voices, he sought out Plavgar.

Plavgar smiled and touched his shoulder with something like pity. "Welcome, my son. I thank you for your courtesy in waiting. It has been a long night for you."

Canady nodded. "The longest of my life, I think. May I ask you one more question, Plavgar?"

"We have no secrets, my son."

"You told me earlier that you rejoiced for Lerrie, and that you were thankful to Mewenta. Who is Mewenta?"

Canady tensed. He knew the answer to the question but he had to ask, had to be *sure*. He listened to Plavgar's words with a thrill of confirmation.

"Mewenta was a great man of The People. On the night before you came to visit us, Ar-thur, he did a wonderful thing for The People. He walked into the fire and his spirit now lives here in the mountains. Because of his deed, the Old Ones smiled. That is why Lerrie now will have a child."

Canady remembered that night. They had hidden in a clump of bushes, looking down on a scene of wild magnificence. A thousand natives had gathered around a roaring fire and the tipis had shone in the moonlight. A naked man bowed to the four directions, gave a last farewell look out into the night and the moons and the stars. His face had been supremely peaceful, the face of a man who had reached the end of a long, long journey.

He walked into the roaring flames....

Mewenta.

Canady turned and walked back to the sphere. He should have been tired but nothing was further from his mind than sleep. He felt an electric excitement in his muscles, an almost supernatural clearness in his mind.

He shook Frank's shoulder.

"Frank, wake up."

Frank sat up in bed, rubbing his eyes. "What's the matter? What time is it?"

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

"Frank, I've got it. I know about The People now."

Frank Landis groped for a cigarette, eyeing his companion sleepily. "Know what about The People? What is there to know?"

Canady laughed. "God, and we tried to impress them with sewing machines!"

Frank waited, puffing on his cigarette. "Well?"

"Frank, don't you see? We've walked right smack into the middle of the biggest discovery ever made by man. Frank, The People *don't die.*"

"What?"

"They don't die, at least not naturally. They're immortal, Frank. They live forever."

Frank stared at him, the cigarette forgotten in his hand.

"Immortal," Canady said again.

He walked over to the port and looked out at the red splendor of the morning sun.

IV

Two hours later, while the camp slept around them and the warmth of the day inched up toward the mountain snows, the men from Earth were still at it. The sphere was blue with stale tobacco smoke and the coffee dregs had turned gummy in the cups.

"I did *not* say you were crazy, Arthur," Frank said. "That's not fair."

Canady watched him and had to smile. Despite the words that tumbled from his lips, Frank obviously thought he was trapped with a lunatic—or at best with a man on the thin edge of sanity. And Canady was finding it very difficult to *talk* to Frank. Frank's eager, friendly personality and his guileless blue eyes just didn't belong in the same room with talk about immortality. It was like trying to explain to a three-year-old child that the Earth wasn't *really* flat but only looked that way.

"It's true, Frank. Our opinions won't change it any."

"But look." Frank nodded his head up and down solemnly, determined to explode the fallacies in the argument. "It just doesn't stand to reason. You say these natives live practically forever. OK. That means that they are maybe thousands of years old. Think what a man could learn if he lived to be a thousand years old! Dammit, he wouldn't be living like a savage. He would have developed a superior, advanced kind of culture. Isn't that true?"

Canady stoked up his pipe. He was feeling light-headed from the long hours without sleep. But if he could just make Frank see—

"I agree. He wouldn't be living like a savage. And he would live in a very advanced type of culture."

Frank threw up his hands. "Well?"

"Well what?" Canady leaned forward. "Think a minute. Are

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

The People *really* living like savages, and what the devil does that mean anyhow? Do you mean they are savages because they hunt animals for food? Or because they live in tents instead of skyscrapers? Or because they use bows and arrows instead of rifles or atom bombs?"

"But their technology *is* simple. You can't deny that."

"I don't have to deny it. Just the same, simple isn't savage. After all, what's a technology for? How do you judge it? I would think you have to rate it by seeing what it does in terms of its own cultural context. The only real index of technological advancement is one of relative efficiency. What do you want a rifle for if you don't need one? What do you need a doctor for if you never get sick?"

"It isn't an efficient technology. You can't tell me a bow is more efficient than a rifle for a hunter. It *isn't.*"

"It is in a special situation, and this is one of them. Look, it's obvious that for some reason these societies must be kept small. Not only that, but they must be peaceful. If they've hit a perfect balance in ecological terms with a bow and arrow, a rifle would just foul everything up. The one cardinal fact about an immortal society is that it must survive. If it doesn't, it's not immortal. And therefore anything that *in the long run* does not contribute to survival cannot be tolerated. Hell, you can't argue with the thing. It *works.*"

"All right, all right." Frank poured himself another cup of coffee. "But all that is theory, speculation. It doesn't prove that those natives live forever."

"True enough. But try this on for size: there is not a single child in this village. There is not a single elderly person. The People can hardly remember when they were young, it was so long ago. And until Mewenta chose to destroy himself, Lerrie could not have a child. When Mewenta died it was such a singular event that natives for miles around came into camp just to witness it. When Lerrie announced that she was pregnant, the whole tribe went into a delirium of joy. It can only mean one thing: this is a rigidly controlled population. No child can be born until the death of an adult makes room for a new member of the society. It would *have* to work that way. If nobody dies and children keep on being born The People would breed themselves into extinction."

"I'll go along with that up to a point. I think you have demonstrated that we have a rigidly controlled population here. I admit that I've never heard of anything like it. But that still doesn't prove all this immortality stuff."

Canady sighed. He was talking to a stone wall. "Look, Frank. *Why* didn't The People accept those

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

sewing machines and rifles? *Why* weren't they impressed with that bomb we dropped, or with this sphere for that matter? *Why* have we failed to make the slightest impression on them?"

"You said it yourself. If you destroy a perfect ecological adjustment...." Frank stopped.

"Exactly. *But how do they know that?* Who told them about ecological adjustments? How could they possibly know what effect a rifle will have on their culture? You started out by saying they were a bunch of savages. Now you're saying they know all about the effects of acculturation and cultural dynamics. You can't have it both ways."

Frank lapsed into silence.

"It's more than just ecology, Frank. I'm convinced that this immortality angle is *part* of their culture—a product of it. It isn't a mutant gland or a shot of wonder drug in the gizzard. It comes about *because* they live the way they do. They know that. So of course they're not going to jeopardize it by changing their culture. What's a rifle or a spaceship against the prospects of living forever? Think of it, Frank! No lying awake nights wondering if that ache in your belly is cancer. No sitting in a hospital room wondering if your wife will live until morning. No certain knowledge that you will see your father and mother buried in a hole in the ground. No waiting for your muscles to turn flabby and the saliva to drool from the corners of your mouth when you eat. No watching a friend get skinnier day by day, no watching the light go out of his eyes. My God, would you trade that for a sewing machine?"

Frank shook his head. "I always read that if you lived forever you would be unhappy and bored stiff. How about that?"

Canady laughed. "Man, that is the rationalization of the ages. You can't live forever, therefore you don't want to. You can't have a steak, therefore you aren't hungry. Are The People unhappy? I'd say they're a million times happier than most men and women on Earth. And would you *really* fight against it if you knew you could live forever? I wouldn't! My life hasn't been any screaming ecstasy but I'll hang onto it as long as I can. And if I could live forever, if I could really do the things I love—"

How do you speak of these things to another? How do you tell of blue skies and sunlight and the laughter of love? How do you tell of the joys of just being alive, of knowing that the world of winds and trees and mountain streams is yours to cherish forever? How do you tell of a love that endures for all the years, all the springs?

"Mewenta killed himself," Frank said bluntly.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

"Sure. Not all people are happy, and these natives *are* people. And perhaps a man might even sacrifice eternal life to bring joy to his fellow man, the joy of children. I have heard that when a man of The People feels restless or discontented, he sets out on a Long Walk alone. He gets close to the land to cleanse his heart. It usually works. If not, there's always the fire."

"You spoke of peace. How about all this raiding that goes on?"

"You mean counting coups?" Canady shrugged. "Sure, they go off and rustle the mharu herds. They have real knock-down fights too. But who said a culture like this has to be dull? It *couldn't* be dull. They don't kill each other in the fights. Have you noticed the combs the men wear in their hair? That's what they take instead of scalps. It serves the same purpose. You don't kill a guy in a football game either, but you can get plenty steamed up about it. *Everything* in the culture is set up to avoid boredom. They alternate roles, for one thing. Every five years or so everyone switches positions. Plavgar is the headman now, but that is only one of the many parts he has played in his life. And all the ceremonies, the periods when the sex tabus are lifted—they all serve the same purpose. Dammit, The People like to have *fun*."

Frank lit another cigarette. "If it's true, Arthur—we've got to find out how it's done. We've *got* to."

Canady smiled. "Have The People ever lied to us?"

"No, I guess not."

"How do they say it's done?"

"I don't follow you."

Canady got up, stretched, and yawned. "I think you better brush up on your guardian spirits, Frank. I think you better start thinking about the Old Ones."

Frank stared. "But that's all superstition—"

"Is it? *How do you know?* Have you ever fasted on Thunder Rock?"

Canady turned before Frank could answer him. He peeled off his clothes and fell into his bunk. He closed his tired eyes.

And he thought—

The world of winds and trees and mountain streams yours to cherish forever . . .

V

The days flowed into weeks and the weeks became months. The People drifted south along the sheltered slopes of the blue mountain range and the cold winter snows settled on the grasslands in a blanket of white. Only the brown and black tips of the grasses showed above the rolling sea of snow and the yedoma herds turned their backs to the wind and pawed at the frozen soil with cold and bleeding hooves.

Arthur Canady lived as though

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

in a dream. He was not himself and he felt the very foundations of the world he had known crumbling away beneath him. Subtly, without any clear line of transition, he found himself caught between two different ways of life. He lived in a cultural twilight, an outsider, belonging neither to the world of his past nor to the world that had suddenly opened up before him.

I'm a marginal man, he thought. *Me, Arthur Canady, a scientist. I don't fit anywhere. Maybe I've never fit in, not really. Maybe I've been searching all my life, never finding, never knowing what it was I sought. . . .*

He spent part of his time in the sphere with Frank, surrounded by the familiar gadgets he had always known, both attracted and repelled by the personality of his companion. The man was such a mixture of receptiveness and bull-headedness. Like most naive men, Frank prided himself on being utterly practical. He was tolerant and respectful of new ideas, but he could never change beyond a certain point. His personality was a finished thing; it had nowhere else to go. Canady envied him in a way, but he was unable to communicate with him except on a very superficial level.

He spent part of his time with The People, riding with them on the winter-thin mharus, facing the wind-driven snows with Plavgar and Lerrie and Rownar. He learned to bring down the moose-like yedoma bulls with an arrow behind the left shoulder, learned to cut the blood-warm hides from the bodies with a stone knife, learned to drink the hot blood against the cold of the winter plains. He sat in the smoke-hazed tipis at night, sweating with the others around the tiny fires of yedoma chips, listening to the stories of The People.

Still, he did not belong.

The People smiled at him and seemed glad to see him, but there was a barrier he could not cross. The men were friendly without being his friends, the women cordial but invincibly remote. Canady let his hair and beard grow long and began to dress in the skin clothing of the natives. There were many times when he set out across the plains alone, eyes narrowed against the cold, and there were many nights that he looked up at the frozen stars and wondered which one was the sun he had known on Earth. . . .

And the dark, terrible irony of the thing that was happening gnawed at his mind day and night. He would sit and smoke his pipe, staring at Frank. Didn't he *know?*

Canady had always been a lonely man, lonely not only for companionship but for a richness and a fullness he had never found in life. His loneliness was made doubly unbearable by the vitality of the life around him. The People

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

offered him nothing, denied him nothing. They made no overtures. They were simply there.

And life everlasting . . .

Canady abandoned all pretense of scientific investigation. He went to see Plavgar. He seated himself in the tipi on Plavgar's right, ate of the ritual food, and groped for words.

"The Old Ones were here before The People came," he said, thinking like a native. But his mind refused to stay on that level. He thought: *Everything they have told me has been the literal truth. There* are *Old Ones. What are they? In the vastness of the universe, life must take many forms. Do they coexist with men, manifesting themselves only in visions? Could they have existed on Earth, serving as the basis for primitive legends? Who knows what we destroyed when we sailed into strange harbors with our ships and our diseases? We never saw our natives until we had corrupted them.* "They must be powerful beings. Did they not try to defend their world?"

"Conquest is a delusion of the young, my son," Plavgar said slowly. "There is room for all. The lives of the Old Ones and the lives of The People touch in only a few places. We are equal but different. To them, as to us, harmony is the highest law of the universe. We all must live so that we *blend* with one another. Men and Old Ones and plants and birds and animals and sky and water—all must work together to make a world fair and good. The Old Ones have given life to us. In return, we give them happiness. They can *feel* the warmth of our lives. They need our presence, just as we need theirs. We live together, and we are both the better for it."

Canady leaned forward. "You too once came to this world in ships?"

Plavgar smiled. "It was long ago. Yes, once we were civilized and advanced, just like yourself."

The irony of the headman's words was not lost on Canady. He brushed it aside. "Plavgar, what is the secret? What is the price a man must pay for eternal life?"

Plavgar looked at him steadily. "We do not live forever, my son. A very long time, yes, but not forever."

"But there must be a secret! What is it?"

"There is only one rule. *You must learn to have a good heart.*"

Canady swallowed hard. "A good heart?"

"That is all. I have told you the truth. I have concealed nothing from you. We have no secrets. There is no magic pill, no gadget that will bring you what you seek. You must *believe,* that is all. You must have a good heart."

"But—" Canady's mind was dizzy with what Plavgar was saying. A good heart? He had learned

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

many things in many schools, but no one had taught him this. How did a man go about getting a good heart?

"A man's heart is within himself," Plavgar said simply. "You must look around you, at the mountains and the skies, at the plants and the animals. You must look within yourself. You must feel that you are a part of all life, and respect it. You must find peace. Then you must go to Thunder Rock and fast for four days. And if you believe, if your heart is good, you will see the Old Ones. The guardian spirit will come to you. Then, my son, you will be one of The People —for always."

The yedoma-chip fire flickered brightly in the tipi. The shadows closed in around Canady, shadows and something else . . .

"Thank you, Plavgar," he said.

He got up and left the tipi, walking out into the cold night air. His boots crunched the snow under his feet.

All he had to do was to believe. All he had to do was to reject all he had ever known. All he had to do was to get a good heart.

Simple!

And there were other problems, other loyalties.

He walked back alone to the sphere.

When he told Frank what he was going to do, Frank hit the ceiling.

"You can't do it, Art." Frank's face was very pale. He backed away from his bearded, wild-looking companion as though Canady was a carrier of some frightful disease. "It's against the law."

"Whose law? We're a long way from Earth, my friend. I'm not a soldier. I'm a scientist."

"You're a fool! Dammit, can't you see what you're doing? You've got a wild bee in your brain and all that talk about being a scientist is so much hogwash. You're going native! You, Arthur Canady, hotshot scientist!"

"All right. I'm going native."

"Look, Art. It's more than that. It's—it's disloyal, that's what it is. You can't just turn your back on your own people for a bunch of wild hunters."

"I can try."

Frank's anger got the better of his caution. "You act like you're so damned superior to everyone, you and your sarcasm! And look at you! What the hell is a good heart? You'll park yourself up on the mountain and starve to death waiting for some native gods to come and hand you immortality. It's crazy, Art! I won't let you do it."

Canady smiled. He stood there, tall and lean and toughened by his life on the plains. His green eyes were cold. "You can't stop me, Frank. Don't try."

"Forget about me. How about your own people, your friends? Don't you owe them something?

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

You're always spouting off about ethics, but what are you doing? You're a traitor!"

Canady sighed. "You still don't see it, do you?"

"See what? There's nothing to see."

"Yes, there *is* something to see. You spoke of ethics. Have you ever heard a phrase about doing to others as you would have them do unto you? I suggest you think about it a little."

"What are you talking about?"

"Look, Frank. We came here from Earth with a lot of high-sounding notions about helping the natives, didn't we? What was it that we offered them, essentially? We offered them what we thought was progress for a price. We would give them technological advancements if they would simply agree to change their culture, their way of life. All they had to do was learn to live the way we do and we would give them something of what we had. Of course, we didn't put the offer to them honestly. We tried to trick them into it—all from the very highest motives, naturally. Was that ethical?"

Frank shrugged. "You tell me."

"I am telling you. If it was ethical, then you can't damn the natives for giving us a dose of our own morals. If it wasn't ethical, then it's pointless for us to prattle about right and wrong. Don't you see, Frank? They've turned the tables on us. They're offering us exactly what we offered to them. The joker is that *they* seem to have the superior culture, if that adjective means anything. They'll give us what they have: eternal life. And the price we have to pay is the same price we were going to charge them: all we have to do is change our culture and live the way *they* do. It's beautiful and neat and maybe a little frightening. But at least they were honest about it: no tricks, no high pressure salesmanship. The choice is there. What we do with it is up to us."

"It's fantastic! You can't believe—"

"I've *got* to believe. That's the whole point. And don't make the mistake of underestimating these natives. They are far from helpless. They have the best of all defenses: a good offense. They protect themselves by *giving*. We could destroy their culture, sure. But if we do we throw away our only chance for immortality! We *need* their culture. Oh, they're safe enough."

"Art, even if you believe all that stuff you still have a duty to your own people. You signed on to do a job. You can't just walk out on it."

"I'm not going to walk out on it. That's why I came back here. I'm going to write up precisely what I have discovered, leaving out nothing. There will be no secrets. I am going to tell our own people exactly what I have found. Hell, I'm giving them the secret of practically

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

eternal life! What man ever did more for his people? If they don't believe me, that's their business. I'm giving them the chance. And I'm giving them the key that may one day unlock this culture, if they will only use it. You see, we made our big mistake in trying to impress The People with technological gadgets. They just don't *care* about technology. Perhaps if we had tried something else—Shakespeare, poetry, art, music — they might have listened to us. I don't know."

Frank shook his head. "You need a doctor."

Canady smiled. "Not any more, pal. And I'll tell you something else. I hope everyone *does* think I'm cracked. I hope they dismiss my report and toss it in the trash file. My conscience is clear. I've found what I want. All I want now is to be let alone."

"You're really going?"

Canady walked over and sat down at his desk. "I'm going to write this report. It will take a couple of days. After that, I'm going out alone."

"To get a good heart?"

"To get a good heart."

Canady assembled his notes and went to work.

Frank Landis stared at him and ran his hand through his sandy hair. Almost desperately, he picked up two battery-powered sewing machines and went out into the snow to peddle his wares.

VI

The lakes and ponds were still frozen solid and the mountain streams were still glazed with ice. The barren black brush of the plains was still skeletal and gaunt against the drifts of silver snow and the winter winds still whined down the canyons and froze the sweat on your face into little drops and rivulets of ice.

Yet the worst was over when Arthur Canady left the sphere and the camp of The People and set out alone into the wilderness. The snow-choked blizzards and the rivers of knife-edged winds had passed. The winter was resting, holding its own, waiting for the spring thaws and the return of green to the land. The gray winter skies had turned to cloudless blue and the great red sun was warm again on his back.

You must feel that you are part of all life. . . .

It was a strange Odyssey and Canady felt that strangeness keenly. It was a quest for the intangible, a search for the unknown. Canady was a trained man and he felt competent to search for many things: success in a field he knew, material prosperity, the solution to a scientific problem. He was enough of a product of his culture to feel at home looking for gold or uranium or a prize set of horns to hang over an old-fashioned fireplace.

But a good heart?

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

That wasn't so easy. Where did you look? How did you go about it? His scientific training got in his way. What was a good heart? It was a phrase he would have denounced as meaningless in a seminar discussion. It was mysticism. It was something for philosophers and theologians and politicians to kick around. It was fuzzy, slippery. . . .

You must look within yourself.

He rode out across the white-coated plains, drifting with the yedoma herds that offered him meat and warm furs. He watched the tiny tracks that criss-crossed over the crust of the snow. He watched the great birds that soared high in the sky on motionless, splendid wings. At night he pitched his small tent in whatever shelter he could find. He sat before his tiny fire and watched the twin moons float down the cold arc of the stars.

He rode into the far mountains, climbed the ageless rocks and stood with his head in the sky looking down upon the vastness of the land below him. He listened to the wind, rode through the whispers of the trees.

You must believe, that is all.

Perhaps he had help; he did not know. The Old Ones lived still in the high places, and perhaps they looked upon him with compassion. Canady felt a great peace growing within him, a peace he had never known in the cities of Earth. It was a hard life but he too became hard. He took a secret pleasure in the toughness of his body, in the sharpness of his eyes. He awakened with the sun, grateful for the life in his body, eager to see what the day would bring. Smiles came easily to his face and he was relaxed, free from worry.

Why had his people thrown all their energies into bigger buildings, more powerful ships, more intricate engines? Why did his people spend all of their lives grubbing at jobs they detested, their greatest joys coming from a slickly gutless mediocrity on the tri-di set? What had they mistaken for progress, what had they sacrificed to that strange god? How had it come about that pleasure had become something to snatch on the run, between business appointments, between the soggy oblivion of sleeping pills?

Progress.

Could it be that true progress might be found on a simple pathway through the trees and not on a super freeway at all? Could it be that eternal life had always come from a kind of faith, from being close to the land and the world of living things?

If you believe, if your heart is good, you will see the Old Ones. The guardian spirit will come to you. Then, my son, you will be one of The People—for always.

Canady rode alone across the rolling plains and up twisting

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

mountain trails. Winter lost its grip on the land and the streams leaped from their banks, fed by the melting snows. Patches of green came again to the lowland valleys and the first wildflowers poked up their heads toward the sun.

When he thought he was ready, Canady turned and rode high into the mountains. The warm spring wind brushed at his face and he filled his lungs with it in a kind of ecstasy. He was at peace, with himself and with the world around him. If nothing else, he had found that much.

He rode toward Thunder Rock to begin his fast.

Thunder Rock thrust its dark, wind-scarred bulk up into the sky high above the timber line where the last stunted trees clung to their precarious holds on the face of the mountain. There was a small cave in the side of Thunder Rock, a cave that opened upon a level sheet of stone that extended to the sheer face of a black glass-smooth cliff. Standing on that shelf of stone, a man could look down on the rivers of clouds that wound around the lower peaks.

Canady had tethered his mharu far down in a mountain valley where there was plenty of grass and water. He could see the valley from Thunder Rock, and once in a while he caught a glimpse of his mount, little more than a black dot on a stamp of green far below.

He allowed himself a few swallows of icy water from a nearby snowbank and that was all. He ate nothing. In the daylight hours he stood on the shelf of rock and looked down on the world, and at night he shivered in his cave. He had his fur robes but there was no material with which to make a fire.

The air was thin and seared his lungs. His joints were sore and stiff. The days without food left him weak and giddy, and he looked down at the black dot of the mharu and wondered whether he would ever be able to climb down the mountain again. He was surprised to find that his mind lost none of its sharpness. In fact, it worked with an almost preternatural clarity, as though all problems were easy and all questions could be answered. He felt as though he were running a fever and he was reminded of the sensation of heightened awareness that sometimes comes with fever dreams. And then he remembered that when the fever was gone a man would wake up and everything that had seemed so clear would vanish like bubbles on the wind. . . .

The days and nights blurred together. He lay quietly in his cave and he had never felt less alone. It gave him an eery sensation to think that each man and woman of The People had once slept where he was sleeping, walked

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

where he was walking, thought where he was thinking. There was no visible sign that they had ever been here but he could see memories of them in every stone, in every stain of dampness, in every tongue of sunlight that licked at the cold surfaces of the rocks. He sensed a continuity of life that he had never appreciated before, a linking together of living things in an endless procession over the plains and into the wild mountain ranges.

On the fourth night, the rains came.

A sea of swollen clouds washed over the stars. For long minutes the moonlight gleamed on the edges of the clouds, setting them aflame with pink and silver light, and then the darkness was complete. There was an electric hush as the world held its breath.

Then the lightning came, jagged white forks of frozen fire that flashed down from black cloud masses and hurled themselves with livid fury at the stolid bulk of the mountains. The thunder crashed on the heels of the lightning, splitting through the skies with a tearing, ripping explosiveness that tore the very air apart.

Canady huddled in his cave, blinking at the savagery of the storm. The walls of the cave were white with the continuous flashing of the lightning, his ears roared with the brute power of the thunder.

Thunder Rock!

The rain came down in solid sheets, hissing on the ledge of stone, pouring in torrents down the cracks and crevices of the mountains. The stone shelf outside the cave became a puddle, a lake, and the water washed into the cave itself, soaking his feet.

Canady stood up, his head almost touching the roof of the cave. He did not fear the storm. He ignored the water at his feet. He stared out into the raging night.

The guardian spirit will come to you.

His skin crawled. A prickling sensation ran up and down his spine. He narrowed his eyes, tried to see. The white flashes of the lightning were everywhere. The thunder beat at his ears.

He *felt* them. He felt them all around him. He closed his eyes. There! He could almost see them—

The Old Ones.

Mighty, powerful, old when the mountains were young. And yet friendly, respectful, equals—

Canady clenched his fists.

He whispered the hardest prayer of all: "Let me believe! Oh, let me believe!"

There was a long moment when nothing seemed to happen. Then, abruptly, the lightning and the thunder died away. The storm rolled off into the distance, muttering and grumbling to itself. There was silence except for the soft patter of the rain outside the cave.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

Canady opened his eyes. There was a sinking sensation in his chest. Had he failed? Was it all for nothing?

Then he saw it.

A great bird flew out of the darkness and perched on the rain-wet shelf of rock. He looked like a hawk, an eagle. He was a mighty bird, raven-black, bold eyes glittering in his head, great wings folded at his sides. There was nothing supernatural about him. Canady could see the drops of water on his feathers, hear the faint whistle when he breathed.

And yet—

The guardian spirit will come to you.

The eagle walked toward the cave.

Canady stepped forward to meet it.

Suddenly, the cave was alive. He saw them now, all around him, glowing like creatures of light and energy. They touched him and they were warm. They seemed to have faces and they were smiling, smiling....

Canady felt tears in his eyes, tears neither of happiness nor of sorrow, tears that came from an emotion too strong to be borne, too mighty to be named. He stood up straight as a man stands among his friends.

And the night was dark no longer and the stars looked down on him from a bright and peaceful sky.

VII

The small gray metallic sphere lifted from the camp of The People but now it carried one man instead of two. It gleamed dully in the light from the great red sun. It hovered high above the surface of Pollux V, looking down on a world flushed with green. It paced the planet as the world rotated on its axis.

It seemed a puny thing as it awaited the arrival of the mother ship from the CAS fleet of Earth, dwarfed by the vault of the heavens and the vast expanse of the land below it. One day it might return, but there were easier worlds for contact. And hidden in its tapes and papers and records it carried a secret no man would believe, a key that could have unlocked one of the hidden secrets of the universe.

Frank Landis sat on his bunk, surrounded by his sewing machines and rifles and model steam engines. He fingered them each in turn, his blue eyes blank and staring, thinking about the crazy man he had left behind....

And the man who had been Arthur Canady came down from Thunder Rock and rode out of the mountains onto the wind-swept plains. The land was green with the promise of spring, the promise of world renewal, the promise of budding trees and fresh grasses and air so clean you could taste it.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

His every sense was heightened, he was alive as he had never been alive before. His heart was a song within him. He knew that the wife of the great Mewenta would be stolen by the Telliomata to make room for him, and he knew that this was a good thing, a happy thing.

The ship was not going home. *He* was going home.

And when he rode into the village of The People there was a smile on every face, and there was a new tipi in the camp circle.

And Plavgar came to meet him and raised his arms in welcome.

And the Old Ones who walked at his side forever whispered to him as he rode, whispered down the winds and across the fields, whispered down from the free skies where the eagle flew, whispered to him alone—

"Welcome, brother, welcome."

The Watchers

Rama the watcher stares into the sky
  Above the Indian jungle. Jet-black eyes
Little by little learn to scan the high
  Glare of the noonday sun. Whatever flies—
Vulture, vimana—Rama sees: and yet
Sees not. His first-learnt precept was: Forget!

Marcus stands sentinel on Hadrian's Wall,
  The far north-eastern frontier which Rome
Flings out among the Scottish mists that fall
  Dank on his face. As Marcus dreams of home
Lights flash across the sky. He curses, thinks
No more of them, salutes his gods, and drinks.

Only today, when their divided world
  Pauses upon the brink of suicide,
Do men, before the fury is unfurled,
  Think of the knowledgeable ones who ride
Through time and space: and wonder, as they stare,
Can the salvation that we seek be *there?*

ANTHONY BRODE

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

Robert Arthur's Murchison Morks ranks with Lord Dunsany's Jorkens, P. G. Wodehouse's Mr. Mulliner and Arthur C. Clarke's Harry Purvis as a man whose life (with the lives of his friends and relations) has embraced more than the usual number of fascinating improbable events, and who knows how to relate these improbabilia with delightfully bland plausibility. The Morks stories appeared chiefly in Argosy *back before the War and have not yet (publishers please note!) been collected in book form. We revived a couple in the early days of this magazine* (Postpaid to Paradise, *Winter-Spring, 1950;* Wilfred Weem, Dreamer, *August, 1951), and now take pleasure in bringing you—in a form especially revised for F&SF—this tale of a stubborn Vermonter and the parlous power of disbelief.*

Obstinate Uncle Otis

by ROBERT ARTHUR

MY UNCLE OTIS [SAID MURCHISON Morks] was the most obstinate man in Vermont. If you know Vermonters, you know that means he was the most obstinate man in the world. It is nothing but the solemn truth to say that Uncle Otis was so obstinate he was more dangerous than the hydrogen bomb.

[*Morks held up one finger impressively, to still any sceptical comments.*]

You find that hard to believe [*he continued*]. Naturally. So I shall tell you just why Uncle Otis was dangerous—dangerous not only to all of mankind but to the solar system as well. Yes, and quite possibly to the entire universe.

His name was Morks, like mine —Otis Morks. He lived in Vermont and I had not seen him for some time. Then one morning I received an urgent telegram from my Aunt Edith, his sister. It said: OTIS STRUCK BY LIGHTNING. SITUATION SERIOUS. COME AT ONCE.

I left on the next train. Not only was I concerned for Uncle Otis, but there was an undertone of unexplained urgency in those ten commonplace words that compelled me to haste.

Late that afternoon I descended in Hillport, Vermont. The only taxi, an ancient sedan, was driven

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

by a village character named Jud Perkins. Jud was also constable, and as I climbed into his decrepit vehicle I saw that he had a revolver strapped around his waist.

I also noticed, across the square, a knot of townspeople standing staring at something. Then I realized they were staring at an empty granite pedestal that had formerly held a large bronze statue to a local statesman named Ogilby—an individual Uncle Otis had always held in the utmost contempt.

Obstinately, Uncle Otis would never believe that anybody would erect a statue to Ogilby, and had always refused to admit that there actually was such a statue in the village square. But there had been, and now it was gone.

The old car lurched into motion. I leaned forward and asked Jud Perkins where the statue had gone. He turned to squint at me sideways.

"Stole," he informed me. "Yestiddy afternoon, about five. In plain view. Yessir, took between two winks of an eye. We was all in Simpkins' store—me 'n' Simpkins 'n' your Uncle Otis Morks 'n' your Aunt Edith 'n' some others. Somebody said as how the town ought to clean Ogilby's statue—become plumb pigeonfied last few years. Your Uncle Otis stuck out his chin.

"'What statue?' he wanted to know, his eyebrows bristlin'. 'There ain't no such thing as a statue to a blubbery-mouthed nincompoop like Ogilby in this town!'

"So, though I knowed it wasn't any use, he wouldn't believe in th' statue if he walked into it an' broke his leg—never met as obstinate a man as Otis Morks for not believing in a thing he don't like—anyway, I turned around to point at it. And it was gone. Minute before it had been there. Now it wasn't. Stole between one look an' th' next."

Jud Perkins spat out the window and turned to look at me in an authoritative manner.

"If you want to know who done it," he said, "these here Fifth Columnists, that's who." (I should add that this occurred during the wartime.) "They took Ogilby 'cause he's bronze, see? Over there, they need copper an' bronze for making shells. So they're stealin' it an' shippin' it over by submarine. But I got my eyes skinned for 'em if they come around here again. I got me my pistol an' I'm on th' watch."

We bumped and banged out toward Uncle Otis' farm, and Jud Perkins continued bringing me up to date on local affairs. He told me how Uncle Otis had come to be struck by lightning—out of his own obstinacy, as I had suspected.

"Day before yestidday," Jud told me, between expectorations of tobacco juice, "your Uncle Otis was out in th' fields when it blowed

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

up a thunderstorm. He got in under a big oak tree. Told him myself a thousand times trees draw lightning, but he's too obstinate to listen.

"Maybe he thought he c'd ignore that lightning, like he ignores Willoughby's barn across the road, or Marble Hill, that his cousin Seth lawed away from him so that now he won't admit there is any such hill. Or th' new dam th' state put in to make a reservoir, and flooded some grazin' land he always used, so that now your Uncle Otis acts 's if you're crazy when you talk about there bein' a dam there.

"Well, maybe he thought he c'd ignore that lightning, but lightning's hard to ignore. It hit that oak, splintered it an' knocked Otis twenty feet. Only reason it didn't kill him, I guess, is because he's always had such prime good health. Ain't been sick a day in his life except that week twenty years ago when he fell off a horse an' had his amnesia an' thought he was a farm machinery salesman named Eustace Lingham, from Cleveland, Ohio.

"Your Aunt Edith seen it happen and run out and drug him in. She put him to bed an' called Doc Perkins. Doc said it was just shock, he'd come to pretty soon, but keep him in bed two, three days.

"Sure enough, your Uncle Otis came to, 'bout supper, but he wouldn't stay in bed. Said he felt fine, and by dad, yestidday in Simpkins' store I never seen him lookin' more fit. Acted ten years younger. Walked like he was on springs an' seemed to give out electricity from every pore."

I asked if increasing age had softened Uncle Otis' natural obstinacy any. Jud spat with extra copiousness.

"Made it worse," he said flatly. "Most obstinate man in Vermont, your Uncle Otis. Dad blast it, when he says a thing ain't, even though it's right there in front of him, blamed if he don't say it so positive you almost believe him.

"Sat on his front stoop myself, only last week, with that old barn of Willoughby's spang in th' way of th' view, and your Uncle Otis lookin' at it 's if it weren't there.

"'Fine view,' I said, 'iffi'n only that barn warn't there,' an' your Uncle Otis looked at me like I was crazy.

"'Barn?' he said. 'What barn? No barn there an' never has been. Finest view in Vermont. See for twenty miles.'"

Jud Perkins chuckled and just missed running down a yellow dog and a boy on a bicycle.

"There's people got so much faith they can believe what ain't," he said. "But your Uncle Otis is th' only man I ever met so obstinate he c'n disbelieve in things that is."

I was in a thoughtful mood when Jud Perkins dropped me at Uncle Otis' gate. Uncle Otis wasn't

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

in sight, but I headed around to the rear of the house and Aunt Edith came hurrying out of the kitchen, her apron, skirts, hair and hands all fluttering.

"Oh, Murchison!" she cried. "I'm so glad you're here. I don't know what to do, I simply don't. The most dreadful thing has happened to Otis, and—"

Then I saw Otis himself, going down the walk to get the evening paper from a tin receptacle at the gate. His small, spare figure upright and a stubborn jaw outthrust, his bushy white eyebrows bristling, he looked unaltered to me. But Aunt Edith only wrung her hands when I said so.

"I know," she sighed. "If you didn't know the truth, you'd think it actually did him good to be hit by lightning. But here he comes. I can't tell you any more now. After supper! He mustn't be allowed to guess—Oh, I do hope nothing dreadful happens before we can stop it."

And then, as Uncle Otis approached with his paper, she fled back into the kitchen.

Uncle Otis certainly did not seem changed, unless for the better. As Jud Perkins had remarked, he seemed younger. He shook my hand heartily and my arm tingled, as if from an electric shock. His eyes sparkled. His whole being seemed keyed up and buoyant with mysterious energy.

We strolled toward the front porch and stood facing the rotting old barn across the road that had spoiled the view. Grasping for a conversational topic as I studied Uncle Otis to discover what Aunt Edith meant, I suggested it was too bad the storm two days before hadn't blown the barn down and finished it.

"Barn?" Uncle Otis scowled at me. "What barn? No barn there, boy! Nothing but th' view—finest view in Vermont. If you c'n see a barn there you'd better get to a doctor fast as you can hike."

As Jud had said, he spoke so convincingly that in spite of myself I had to turn for another look at the structure. I remained staring for quite some time, I expect, and probably I blinked.

Because Uncle Otis was telling the truth.

There wasn't any barn—now.

All through supper a suspicion of the incredible truth grew on me. And after supper, while Uncle Otis read his paper in the parlor, I followed Aunt Edith into the kitchen.

She only sighed when I told her about the barn, and looked at me with haunted eyes.

"Yes," she whispered, "it's Otis. I knew when the statue . . . went —yesterday when we were in Simpkins' store. I was looking right at it when Otis said what he did and it—it was just gone, right from under my eyes. That's when I sent you the telegram."

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

"You mean," I asked, "that since Uncle Otis was struck by lightning, his obstinacy has taken a new turn? He used to think things he didn't like didn't exist, and that was all. But now, when he thinks it, due to some peculiar heightening of his tremendously obstinate will power, the things *don't* exist? He just disbelieves them right out of existence?"

Aunt Edith nodded. "They just *go!*" she cried, almost wildly. "When he says a thing's not, now it's *not.*"

I confess the idea made me uneasy. There were a number of unpleasant possibilities that occurred to me. The list of things—and people—Uncle Otis didn't believe in was long and varied.

"What," I asked, "do you suppose the limit is? A statue, a barn—where do you suppose it stops?"

"I don't know," she told me. "Maybe there isn't any limit to it. Otis is an *awfully* obstinate man and—well, suppose something reminds him about the dam? Suppose he says there isn't any dam? It's a hundred feet high and all that water behind it—"

She did not have to finish. If Uncle Otis suddenly disbelieved the Hillport dam out of existence, the impounded water that would be set free would wipe away the village, and might kill the whole five hundred inhabitants.

"And then, of course, there are all those far-off countries with the funny names he's never believed were real," Aunt Edith whispered. "Like Zanzibar and Martinique."

"And Guatemala and Polynesia," I agreed, frowning. "If he were reminded of one of those by something, and took it into his head to declare it didn't exist, there's no telling what might happen. The sudden disappearance of any one of them—why, tidal waves and earthquakes would be the least we could expect."

"But what can we do to stop him?" Aunt Edith wanted to know, desperately. "We can't tell him that he mustn't—"

She was interrupted by a snort as Uncle Otis marched into the kitchen with the evening paper.

"Listen to this!" he commanded, and read us a short item, the gist of which was that Seth Youngman, the second cousin who had lawsuited his hill away from him, was planning to sell Marble Hill to a New York company that would quarry it. Then Uncle Otis threw the paper down on the kitchen table in disgust.

"What they talking about?" he barked, his eyebrows bristling. "Marble Hill? No hill around here by that name, and never has been. And Seth Youngman never owned a hill in his life. What kind of idiots get this paper out, I want to know?"

He glowered at us. And in the silence, a faint distant rumbling, as of displaced stones, could be

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

heard. Aunt Edith and I turned as one. It was still light, and from the kitchen window we could see to the northwest, where Marble Hill stood up against the horizon like a battered derby hat—or where it *had* stood.

The ancient prophets may have had faith strong enough to move mountains. But Uncle Otis was possessed of something far more remarkable, it seemed—a lack of faith which could unmove them.

Uncle Otis himself, unaware of anything unusual, picked up the paper again, grumbling.

"Everybody's crazy these days," he declared. "Piece here about President Roosevelt. Not Teddy Roosevelt, but somebody called Franklin. Can't even get a man's name straight. Everybody ought to know there's no such president as Franklin Roo—"

"Uncle Otis!" I shouted. "Look, there's a mouse!"

Uncle Otis stopped and turned. There *was* a mouse, crouched under the stove, and it was the only thing I could think of to distract Uncle Otis' attention before he expressed his disbelief in Franklin D. Roosevelt. I was barely in time. I dabbed at my brow. Uncle Otis scowled.

"Where?" he demanded. "No mouse there I can see."

"Th—" I started to point. Then I checked myself. As soon as he had spoken, of course, the mouse was gone. I said instead that I must have been mistaken. Uncle Otis snorted and strode back toward the parlor. Aunt Edith and I looked at each other.

"If he'd said—" she began. "—if he'd finished saying there isn't any President Roose—"

She never completed the sentence. Uncle Otis, going through the doorway, caught his foot in a hole worn through the linoleum and fell full length into the hall. As he went down, his head struck a table, and he was unconscious when we reached him.

I carried Uncle Otis into the parlor and laid him on the old horsehair sofa. Aunt Edith brought a cold compress and spirits of ammonia. Together we worked over Uncle Otis' limp form, and presently he opened his eyes, blinking at us without recognition.

"Who're you?" he demanded. "What happened to me?"

"Otis!" Aunt Edith cried. "I'm your sister. You fell and hit your head. You've been unconscious."

Uncle Otis glowered at us with deep suspicion. "Otis?" he repeated. "My name's not Otis. Who you think I am, anyway?"

"But it *is* Otis!" Aunt Edith wailed. "You're Otis Morks, my brother, and you live in Hillport, Vermont. You've lived here all your life."

Uncle Otis' lower lip stuck out obstinately.

"My name's *not* Otis Morks,"

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

he declared, rising. "I'm Eustace Lingham, of Cleveland, Ohio. I sell farm machinery. I'm not your brother. I've never seen you before, either of you. I've got a headache and I'm tired of talking. I'm going out and get some fresh air. Maybe it'll make my head feel better."

Dumbly Aunt Edith stood to one side. Uncle Otis marched out into the hall and through the front door. Aunt Edith, peering out the window, reported that he was standing on the front steps, looking up at the stars.

"It's happened again," she said despairingly. "His amnesia's come back. Just like the time twenty years ago when he fell off a horse and thought he was this Eustace Lingham from Cleveland for a whole week.

"Oh, Murchison, now we've got to call the doctor. But if the doctor finds out about the other, he'll want to shut him up. Only, if anybody tries to shut Otis up, he'll just disbelieve in them and the place they want to shut him up in, too. Then they—they—"

"But if something isn't done," I pointed out, "there's no telling what may happen. He's bound to read about President Roosevelt again. You can't miss his name in the papers these days, even in Vermont. Or else he'll come across a mention of Madagascar or Guatemala."

"Or get into a fuss with the income tax people," Aunt Edith put in. "He keeps getting letters from them about why he's never paid any income tax. The last letter, they said they were going to send somebody to call on him in person. But he says there isn't any such thing as an income tax, so there can't be any income-tax collectors. So if a man comes here saying he's an income-tax collector, Uncle Otis will just not believe in him. Then..."

Helplessly we looked at each other. Aunt Edith grabbed my arm.

"Murchison!" she gasped. "Quick! Go out with him. We mustn't leave him alone. Only last week he decided that there aren't any such things as stars!"

I did not hesitate an instant. A moment later I was on the porch beside Uncle Otis, who was breathing in the cool evening air and staring upward at the spangled heavens, a look of deepest disbelief on his face.

"Stars!" he barked, stabbing a skinny forefinger toward the star-dotted sky. "A hundred million billion trillion dillion miles away, every last one of 'em! And every one of 'em a hundred times bigger 'n the sun! That's what the book said. You know what *I* say? I say bah! Nothing's that big, or that far off. You know what those things they look at through telescopes and call stars are? They're not stars at all. Fact is, there's no such thing as st—"

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

"Uncle Otis!" I cried loudly. "A mosquito!"

And I brought my hand down on the top of his head with solid force.

I had to distract him. I had to keep him from saying it. The universe is a big thing, of course, probably too big even for Uncle Otis to disbelieve out of existence. But I didn't dare take a chance. So I yelled and slapped him.

But I'd forgotten about the return of his ancient amnesia, and his belief that he was Eustace Lingham of Cleveland. When he had recovered from my blow he stared at me coldly.

"I'm not your Uncle Otis!" he snapped. "I'm nobody's Uncle Otis. I'm nobody's brother, either. I'm Eustace Lingham and I've got a headache. I'm going to have my cigar and I'm going to bed, and in the morning I'm going back to Cleveland."

He turned, stamped inside, and went up the stairs.

I trailed after him, unable to think of a helpful plan, and Aunt Edith followed us both up the stairs. She and I came to a stop at the top. Together we watched Uncle Otis stride into his room and close the door.

After that we heard the bedsprings squeak as he sat down. This was followed by the scratching of a match and in a moment we smelled cigar smoke. Uncle Otis always allowed himself one cigar, just before going to bed.

"Otis Morks!" we heard him mutter to himself, and one shoe dropped to the floor. "Nobody's got such a name. It's a trick of some kind. Don't believe there is any such person."

Then he was silent. The silence continued. We waited for him to drop the other shoe... and when a full minute had passed, we gave each other one horrified look, rushed to the door and threw it open.

Aunt Edith and I stared in. The window was closed and locked. A cigar in an ash tray on a table by the bed was sending a feather of smoke upwards. There was a hollow in the bed covers, slowly smoothing out, where someone might have been sitting a moment before. A single one of Uncle Otis' shoes lay on the floor beside the bed.

But Uncle Otis [*Morks looked at us with an expression of deep melancholy*] Uncle Otis, of course, was gone. He had disbelieved himself out of existence. . . .

[*Then Morks sighed gently and waited for someone to offer him a drink.*]

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

*It's fitting that Avram Davidson should use the device of a tape-recorded interview in his latest story; for surely few writers can reproduce dialog with such tape-like fidelity. Most accounts of saucer sightings and contacts with Ufonians are patently hoaxes or frauds; but now and then one seems marked by at least subjective sincerity, like the narratives of Orfeo M. Angelucci (*THE SECRET OF THE SAUCERS, *Amherst, 1955) and Truman Bethurum (*ABOARD A FLYING SAUCER, *DeVorss, 1954). Even these sincerely intentioned tales may, however, fail to reach the public in precisely factual form—as witness the fate of*

The Grantha Sighting

by AVRAM DAVIDSON

THERE WERE VISITORS, OF COURSE—there were visitors pretty nearly every night nowadays. The side road had never had such traffic. Emma Towns threw the door open and welcomed them, beaming. Walt was there behind her, smiling in his usual shy way.

"Hello there, Emma," Joe Trobridge said. "Won't let me call her 'Mrs. Towns,' you know," he explained to his friends. They went into the warm kitchen of the farmhouse. "This is Si Haffner, this is Miss Anderson, this is Lou DelBello—all members of the Unexplained Aerial Phenomena Coordinators, too. And *this* gentleman," he added, when the other three had finished shaking hands, "is Mr. Tom Knuble."

"Just call me Long Tom," said Long Tom.

Emma said, "Oh, not the radio man? *Really?* Well, my goodness!"

"Tom would like to make some tape recordings from here," Joe explained. "To replay on his program. If you don't mind, that is?"

Why of *course* they didn't mind. And they made the visitors sit right down and they put hot coffee on the table, and tea and home-baked bread and some of Emma's preserves and some of Walt's scuppernong wine, and sandwiches, because they were sure their visitors must be tired and hungry after that long drive.

"This is mighty nice of you," Long Tom said. "*And* very tasty." The Townses beamed, and urged

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

him to take more. Joe cleared his throat.

"This must be at least the fifth or sixth time *I've* been up here," he said. "As well as people I've told they could come up—"

"Any time—" said Emma.

"Any friends—" said Walt.

Joe half-smiled, half-chuckled. A slight trace of what might have been embarrassment was in the sound. "Well, from what I hear, you always put out a spread like this no matter who comes, and I . . . we . . . well . . ."

Miss Anderson came to his rescue. "We talked it over coming up," she said. "And we feel and we are agreed that you are so helpful and accommodating and in every way," she floundered.

"So we want to pay for the refreshments which is the least we can do," Lou DelBello intervened. The visitors nodded and said, Absolutely. Only Right.

Walt and Emma looked at each other. Either the idea had never occurred to them or they were excellent actors. "Oh, *no!*" said Walt. "Oh, we wouldn't *think* of it," said Emma.

They were glad to, she said. It was their privilege. And nothing could induce them to take a cent.

Long Tom put down his cup. "I understand that you wouldn't take any payment for newspaper stories or posing for photographs, either," he said. The Townses shook their heads. "In short—wait a minute, let's get these tapes rolling . . .

"Now, Mr. and Mrs. Walter F. Towns up here in Paviour's Bridge, New York," he continued after a moment, having started the recording machine; "I understand that you have both refused to commercialize in any way your experiences on the third of October, is that right? Never taken any money—AP, UP, *Life* Magazine, *Journal-American* — wouldn't accept payment, is that right, Mr. and Mrs. Walter F. Towns up here in Paviour's Bridge, New York?"

Emma and Walt urged each other with nods of the head to speak first into the whizzing-rolling device, wound up saying together, "That's *No we* right *didn't.*"

"I would just like to say—oh excuse me Tom—" Lou began.

"No, go right ahead—"

"I would just like—"

"This is Lou DelBello, you folks out there on the party line: Lou. Del. Bello. Who is up here in Paviour's Bridge, New York, at the Walter F. Townses', along with Miss Jo Anderson, Si Haffner, and Joe Trobridge—as well as myself, Long Tom—all members of that interesting organization you've heard of before on our five-hour conversations over Station WRO, sometimes called familiarly the Flying Saucer Club, but known officially as the Unexplained Aerial Phenomena Coordinating Corps. *Well.* Quite a mouthful. And we

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

are up here accepting the very gracious hospitality of Walt and Emma who are going to tell us, in their own words just exactly. what. it was. that happened on the famous night of October third, known as the October Third Sighting or the Grantha Incident; go right ahead, Lou DelBello."

Still dogged and game, Lou went ahead. "I would just like to say that in speaking of that very gracious hospitality that Walt and Emma have refused to take one red cent for so much as a sandwich or a cup of coffee. To all the visitors up here, I mean. So that certainly should take care of in advance of any charges or even the mention of, ah, com*mer*cialism."

Long Tom paused with a piece of home-baked bread and apple butter half way into his mouth and gestured to Joe Trobridge.

"Yes, Lou," Joe leaped into the breach, "the same people who didn't believe Columbus and are now so scornful of all the various and innumerable U.A.P. sightings, well, the same *type* people, I mean —some certain individuals who shall be nameless who have been suggesting that the Grantha Incident is just a *trick*, or maybe the Townses and myself are in business together—"

Miss Anderson said, "The Cloth-Like Substance, you mean, Joe?"

Long Tom swallowed, wiped his mouth. "Well, I didn't know they *made* apple butter like that anymore, Emma," he said. "Yessir folks out there on the party line, the Townses up here in Paviour's Bridge, New York, are poultry farmers by profession but any time Emma wants to go into the preserves business she can sure count on me to—"

Joe interrupted. "I'd just like to clear up one point, Tom—"

"Why sure, Joe, go right ahead. This is the Long Tom Show, you folks out there on the party line. Five hours of talk and music on Station WRO . . ."

Si Haffner for the first time spoke up:

"I understand this Cloth-Like Substance is still refusing or rather I should say *defying* analysis in the laboratories; is that right Joe?"

Joe said it certainly was. This Cloth-Like Substance, he reminded the listeners-to-be, was left behind at the Townses after the October Third Sighting. It was soft, it was absorbent, it was non-inflammable; and it resembled nothing known to our terrestrial science. He had tried to analyze it in his own lab, but, failing to do so, he had turned it over to the General Chemical Company. So far even *they*, with their vastly superior facilities, were unable to say just what it was. And while in a way he was *flattered* that some people thought well maybe he was in cahoots with an outfit like GenChem, well—

"Yessir," said Long Tom; "just let me tell you folks out there on

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

the party line that there is *noth*ing like this chicken-salad sandwich that Mrs. Emma F. Towns puts up out here in Paviour's Bridge, New York. *Won*derful. But I would like you to tell us in your own words, Emma, just what exactly *did* happen that certain night of October third, known to some as the Grantha Incident. Tell us in your own words."

Emma said, "Well."

"Tell us what kind of a day it was. What was the first thing you did?"

Emma said, "Well . . ."

The first thing she did was to get up and heat the mash for the chicks. Not that she minded getting up that early. Some people who'd lived in the city and talked of settling down on a little poultry farm, when it actually came *to* it, they found they didn't care for it too much. But not Emma. No; it wasn't the hours she minded.

And it wasn't the work. She *liked* work. The house was well-built, it was easy to keep warm, it had a lovely view. But it was so far away from everybody. Even the mailman left his deliveries way down at the bottom of the hill. There was the radio, there was the television, but — when you came right down to it—who came to the house? The man who delivered the feed. The man who collected the eggs. And that was all.

The day passed like every other day. Scatter cracked corn. Regular feeding. Scatter sawdust. Clean out from under the wiring. Mix the oats and the clarified buttermilk. Sardine oil. Collect the eggs. Wash them. Pack them. And, of course, while the chickens had to eat, so did the Townses.

No, there was nothing unusual about the day. Until about—

"—about five o'clock, I think it was," Emma said.

"*Noth*ing unusual had happened previous to this?" Long Tom asked. "You had *no* warning?"

Emma said No, none.

"I would just like to say—" Joe Trobridge began.

"Well, now just a min—" Tom cut in.

"I just want to clear up one point," Joe said. "Now, prior to the time I arrived at your doorstep that night, had you ever seen or heard of me before, Emma?"

"No, never."

"That's all I wanted to say. I just wanted to clear up that point."

"You got that did you, all you folks out there on the party line?" inquired Long Tom. "They had never seen, *or* heard of each other before. And then, Emma, you were about to say, about five o'clock?"

About five o'clock, when the dark was falling, Emma first noticed the cloud. She called it to Tom's attention. It was a funny-looking cloud. For a long time it

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

didn't move, although the other clouds did. And then—as the bright reds of the sunset turned maroon, magenta, purple—the cloud slowly came down from the sky and hovered about ten feet over the Townses' front yard.

"Walt, there is something *very* funny about that cloud," said Emma.

"I don't believe it's no cloud," Walt declared. "Listen to that noise, would you." It came from the . . . cloud—thing—whatever it was: a rattling muffled sort of noise, and an angry barking sort of noise. The air grew very dark.

"Do you think we should put on the lights?" Emma said. Walt grunted. And the—whatever it was—came down with a lurching motion and hit the sod with a clonk. It was suddenly lit up by a ring of lights, which went out again almost at once, went on, went out. Then there was a long silence.

A clatter. A rattle. And again, the barking sound.

"Sounds like someone's cussing, almost. Somehow," Walt said.

"*I* am going to put on the *light*," said Emma. And she did. The noise stopped. Emma put on her sweater. "Come out on the porch with me," she said. They opened the door and stepped out on the porch. They looked over at the . . . thing. It sat on the ground about fifty feet away.

"Is anything *wrong?*" Emma called. "Yoo-hoo! Anything wrong?"

There was a slither and a clatter. The lights went on again in the thing and there was now an opening in it and two figures in the opening. One of them started forward, the other reached out a—was that an *arm?* but the first figure barked angrily and it drew back. And there was another sound now, a sort of yelping noise, as the first figure walked towards the house and the second figure followed it.

"A man and his wife," said Emma. Walt observed they were dressed light, considering the time of year.

"That's really nothing but what you might call, well, bloomers, that they got on, though they *are* long and they *do* reach up high."

"Sssshh! Hello, there. My name is Mrs. Towns and this is my husband, Mr. Towns. You folks in any trouble?"

The folks halted some distance away. Even at that distance it was possible to see that they were much shorter and broader than the Townses.

"Why you'll catch your *death* out there with no coats on!" Emma exclaimed. "You're all *blue!*" Actually, it was a sort of blue-*green,* but she didn't want to embarrass them. "Come in, come on in," she gestured. They came on in. The yelping noise began again. "There. Now isn't it warmer?" Emma closed the door.

From the crook of her—*was* it

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

an arm? It couldn't be anything else—one of the figures lifted up the source of the yelping. Emma peered at it.

"Well, my *goodness!*" Emma said. She and Walt exchanged glances. "Isn't it just the picture of its father!" she said. An expression which might have been a smile passed over the faces of the two figures.

The first figure reached into its garment and produced an oval container, offered it, withdrew it as a petulant yelp was heard. The figure looked at Emma, barked diffidently.

"Why, don't you *know* what she's saying, Walt?" Emma asked.

Walt squirmed. "It seems like I do, but I know I couldn't, hardly," he said.

Emma was half-indignant. "Why, you can, too. She's saying: 'The car broke down and I wonder if I might warm the baby's bottle?' *That's* what she's saying. — Of *course* you may. You just come along into the kitchen."

Walt scratched his ear, looked at the second figure. It looked at him.

"Why, I guess I'd better go along back with you," Walt said, "and take a look at your engine. That was a bad rattle you got there."

It was perhaps half an hour later that they returned. "Got it fixed all right now," Walt said. "Loose umpus on the hootenanny . . . baby OK?"

"Sshh . . . it's asleep. All it wanted was a warm bottle and a clean diaper."

There was a silence. Then everyone was talking (or barking) at once— of course, in low tones. "Oh, glad to do it, glad to be of help," said Emma. "Any time . . . and whenever you happen to be around this way, why just you drop in and see us. Sorry you can't stay."

"Sure thing," Walt seconded. "That's right."

Emma said, "It's so lonely up here. We hardly ever have any visitors at all. . . . Goodby! Goodby, now!" And finally the visitors closed the opening in their vehicle.

"Hope the umpus stays fixed in the hootenanny . . ." There was a burst of pyrotechnic colors, a rattling noise, and a volley of muffled barks. "It didn't," Walt said. "*Hear* him cussing!" The rattling ceased, the colors faded into a white mist. "Got it now . . . look at those lights go round and round . . . there they go. Wherever it is they're going," he concluded, uncertainly. They closed the door. Emma sighed.

"It *was* nice having someone to visit with," she said. "Heaven only knows how long it will be before anyone else comes here."

It was exactly three hours and five minutes. Two automobiles came tearing up the road and screamed to a stop. People got out, ran pounding up the path, knocked at the door. Walt answered.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

At first they all talked at once, then all fell silent. Finally, one man said, "I'm Joe Trobridge of the U.A.P.C.C.—the Unexplained Aerial—listen, a *sighting* was reported in this vicinity! Did you see it? A flying saucer? Huh?"

Walt nodded slowly. "So *that's* what it was," he said. "I thought it was some kind of a airship."

Trobridge's face lit up. Everyone began to babble again. Then Trobridge said, "You *saw* it? Was it close? What? SHUT UP, EVERYBODY! On your front lawn? What'd they look like? What—?"

Walt pursed his mouth. "I'll tell ya," he began. "They were blue."

"Blue?!" exclaimed Trobridge.

"Well . . ." Walt's tone was that of a man willing to stretch a point. "Maybe it was green."

"Green!?"

"Well, which was it?" someone demanded. "Blue or green?"

Walt said, in the same live-and-let-live tone, "Bluish-green." Joe Trobridge opened his mouth. "Or, greenish-blue," Walt continued, cutting him off. The visitors milled around, noisily.

"How were they dressed?"

Walt pursed his mouth. "I'll tell ya," he said. "They were wearing what ya might call like bloomers . . ."

"Bloomers!?"

Emma glanced around nervously. The visitors didn't seem to like what Walt was telling them. Not at all.

Joe Trobridge pressed close. "Did they say what their purpose was, in visiting the Earth?" he asked, eagerness restored somewhat—but only somewhat.

Walt nodded. "Oh, sure. Told us right away. Come to see if they could warm the baby's bottle." Someone in the crowd made a scornful noise. "That was it, y'see . . ." his voice trailed off uncertainly.

The man named Joe Trobridge looked at him, his mouth twisted. "Now, *wait* a minute," he said. "Just wait a *min*ute . . ."

Emma took in the scene at a glance. No one would believe them. They'd all go away and never come back and no one would ever visit them again—except the man who delivered the feed and the man who collected the eggs. She looked at the disappointed faces around her, some beginning to show anger, and she got up.

"My husband is joking," she said, loudly and clearly. "Of *course* it wasn't like that."

Joe turned to her. "Did you see it, too, lady? What happened, then? I mean, *really* happened? Tell us in your own words. What did they look like?"

Emma considered for a moment. "They were very tall," she said. "And they had on spacesuits. And their leader spoke to us. He looked just like us only maybe his head was a bit bigger. He didn't have no hair. He didn't really speak

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

English—it was more like tlep-pathy—"

The people gathered around her closely, their eyes aglow, their faces eager. "Go on," they said; "go on—"

"His name was . . . Grantha—"

"Grantha," the people breathed.

"And he said we shouldn't be afraid, because he came in peace. 'Earth people,' he said, 'we have observed you for a long time and now we feel the time has come to make ourselves known to you. . . .'"

Long Tom nodded. "So that's the way it was."

"That's the way it was," she said. "More coffee, anybody?"

"You brew a mighty fine cup of coffee, Mrs. Emma Towns up here in Paviour's Bridge, New York, let me tell the folks on the party line," Long Tom said. "No sugar thanks, just cream. . . . Well, say, about this piece of Cloth-Like Substance. It's absorbent—it's soft—it doesn't burn—and it can't be analyzed. Now, about how big is this wonderful item which Grantha and his people left behind as a sample of their superior technicology and peaceful intentions and which continues to baffle scientists? About how big is it? Just tell us in your own words. . . ."

Emma considered. Joe pursed his lips.

Lou DelBello smiled. "Well, I've had the good fortune to see it," he said, "and—speaking as the father of three—the, uh, best comparison of its size which I could give you, I'd say it's just about as big as a diaper!"

He guffawed. Joe burst out laughing, as did Si Haffner. Miss Anderson giggled. Long Tom chuckled. Emma and Walt looked nervously at each other, looked anxiously at their oh, so very welcome guests—but only for a moment. Then, reassured, they leaned back and joined in the merriment.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

This is the first published story of "a young lady-type writer of 25," who writes fiction in the time not taken up by being a reporter (for the New Haven Register *and for* Newsweek*) and a wife. F&SF is accustomed to noteworthy "firsts" (in this issue, for instance, both Avram Davidson and Chad Oliver are authors who made their debuts here); but still I'm impressed by the unusual authority of Mrs. Reed in this hauntingly uneasy story of a strange cultural enclave just off Highway 301.*

The Wait

by KIT REED

PENETRATING A WINDSHIELD BLOTCHED with decalcomanias of every tourist attraction from Luray Caverns to Silver Springs, Miriam read the road sign.

"It's Babylon, Georgia, Momma. Can't we stop?"

"Sure, sweetie. Anything you want to do." The little, round, brindle woman took off her sunglasses. "After all, it's your trip."

"I know, Momma, I know. All I want is a popsicle, not the Grand Tour."

"Don't be fresh."

They were on their way home again, after Miriam's graduation trip through the South. (Momma had planned it for years, and had taken two months off, right in the middle of the summer, too, and they'd left right after high school commencement ceremonies. "Mr. Margulies said I could have the whole summer, because I've been with him and Mr. Kent for so long," she had said. "Isn't it wonderful to be going somewhere together, dear?" Miriam had sighed, thinking of her crowd meeting in drug stores and in movies and eating melted ice cream in the park all through the good, hot summer. "Yes," she'd said.)

Today they'd gotten off 301, somehow, and had driven dusty Georgia miles without seeing another car or another person, except for a Negro driving a tractor down the softening asphalt road, and two kids walking into a seemingly deserted country store. Now they drove slowly into a town, empty because it was two o'clock and the

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

sun was shimmering in the streets. They *had* to stop, Miriam knew, on the pretext of wanting something cold to drink. They had to reassure themselves that there were other people in the town, in Georgia, in the world.

In the sleeping square, a man lay. He raised himself on his elbows when he saw the car, and beckoned to Miriam, grinning.

"Momma, see *that* place? Would you mind if I worked in a place like *that?*" They drove past the drugstore, a chrome palace with big front windows.

"Oh, Miriam, don't start that again. How many times do I have to tell you, I don't *want* you working in a drugstore when we get back." Her mother made a pass at a parking place, drove once again around the square. "What do you think I sent you to high school for? I want you to go to Katie Gibbs this summer, and get a good job in the fall. What kind of boyfriends do you think you can meet jerking sodas? You know, I don't want you to work for the rest of your life. All you have to do is get a good job, and you'll meet some nice boy, maybe from your office, and get married, and never have to work again." She parked the car and got out, fanning herself. They stood under the trees, arguing.

"Momma, even if I *did* want to meet your nice people, I wouldn't have a thing to wear." The girl settled into the groove of the old argument. "I want some pretty clothes and I want to get a car. I know a place where you only have to pay forty dollars a month. I'll be getting thirty-five a week at the drugstore—"

"And spending it all on yourself, I suppose. How many times do I have to explain, nice people don't work in places like that. Here I've supported you, fed you, dressed you, ever since your father died, and now, when I want you to have a *nice* future, you want to throw it out of the window for a couple of fancy dresses." Her lip quivered. "Here I am practically dead on my feet, giving you a nice trip, and a chance to learn typing and shorthand and have a nice future—"

"Oh, Momma." The girl kicked at the sidewalk and sighed. She said the thing that would stop the argument. "I'm sorry, I'll like it, I guess, when I get started."

Round, soft, jiggling and determined, her mother moved ahead of her, trotting in too-high heels, skirting the square. "The main thing, sweetie, is to be a *good* girl. If boys see you behind a soda fountain, they're liable to get the wrong idea. They may think they can get away with something, and try to take advantage . . ."

In the square across the street, lying on a pallet in the sun, a young boy watched them. He called out.

". . . Don't pay any attention to him," the mother said. ". . . and if

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

boys know you're a *good* girl, one day you'll meet one who will want to marry you. Maybe a big business man, or a banker, if you have a good steno job. But if he thinks he can take advantage," her eyes were suddenly crafty, "he'll never marry you. You just pay attention. Don't ever let boys get away with anything. Like when you're on a date, do you ever—"

"Oh, Momma," Miriam cried, insulted.

"I'm sorry, sweetie, but I do so want you to be a *good* girl. Are you listening to me, Miriam?"

"Momma, that lady seems to be calling me. That one lying over there in the park. What do you suppose she wants?"

"I don't know. Well, don't just stand there. She looks like a *nice* woman. Go over and see if you can help her. Guess she's sunbathing, but it *does* look funny, almost like she's in bed. Ask her, Mirry. Go *on!*"

"Will you move me into the shade?" The woman, obviously one of the leading matrons of the town, was lying on a thin mattress. The shadow of the tree she was under had shifted with the sun, leaving her in the heat.

Awkwardly, Miriam tugged at the ends of the thin mattress, got it into the shade.

"And my water and medicine bottle too, please?"

"Yes ma'am. Is there anything the matter, ma'am?"

"Well." The woman ticked the familiar recital off on her fingers: "It started with cramps and—you know — lady-trouble. Thing is, now my head burns all the time and I've got a pain in my left side, not burning, you know, but just sort of tingling."

"Oh, that's too bad."

"Well, has your mother there ever had that kind of trouble? What did the doctor prescribe? What would *you* do for my kind of trouble? Do you know anybody who's had anything like it? That pain, it starts up around my ribs, and goes down, sort of zig-zag . . ."

Miriam bolted.

"Momma, I've changed my mind. I don't want a popsicle. Let's get out of here, please. Momma?"

"If you don't mind, sweetie, I want a coke." Her mother dropped on a bench. "I don't feel so good. My head . . ."

They went into the drugstore. Behind the chrome and plate glass, it was like every drugstore they'd seen in every small town along the east coast, cool and dim and a little dingy in the back. They sat at one of the small, round wooden tables, and a dispirited waitress brought them their order.

"What did Stanny and Bernice say when you told them you were going on a big tour?" Miriam's mother slupped at her coke, breathing hard.

"Oh, they thought it was all right."

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

"Well, I certainly hope you tell them all about it when we get back. It's not every young girl gets a chance to see all the historical monuments. I bet Bernice has never been to Manassas."

"I guess not, Momma."

"I guess Stanny and that Mrs. Fyle will be pretty impressed, when you get back and tell 'em where all we've been. I bet that Mrs. Fyle could never get Toby to go anywhere with her. Of course, they've never been as close as we've been."

"I guess not, Momma." The girl sucked and sucked at the bottom half of her popsicle, to keep it from dripping on her dress.

In the back of the store, a young woman in dirty white shorts held on to her little son's hand and talked to the waitress. The baby, about two, sat on the floor in gray, dusty diapers.

"Your birthday's coming pretty soon, isn't it?" She dropped the baby's hand.

"Yeah. Oh, you ought to see my white dress. Golly, Anne, hope I won't have to Wait too long. Anne, what was it like?"

The young woman looked away from her, with the veiled face of the married, who do not talk about such things.

"Myla went last week, and she only had to stay for a couple of days. Don't tell anybody, because of course she's going to marry Harry next week, but she wishes she could see Him again. . . ."

The young woman moved a foot, accidentally hit the baby. He snuffled and she helped him onto her lap, gurgling at him. In the front of the store, Miriam heard the baby and jumped. "Momma, come *on*. We'll never get to Richmond by night. We've already lost our way twice!" Her mother, dabbling her straws in the ice at the bottom of her paper cup, roused herself. They dropped two nickels on the counter and left.

They skirted the square again, ignoring the three people who lay on the grass motioning and calling to them with a sudden urgency. Miriam got into the car.

"Momma, come *on!* Momma!" Her mother was still standing at the door by the driver's seat, hanging on to the handle. Miriam slid across the front seat to open the door for her. She gave the handle an impatient twist and then started as she saw her mother's upper body and face slip past the window in a slow fall to the pavement. "Oh, I *knew* we never should have come!" It was an agonized, vexed groan. Red-faced and furious, she got out of the car, ran around to help her mother.

On their pallets in the park, the sick people perked up. Men and women were coming from everywhere. Cars pulled up and stopped and more people came. Kneeling on the pavement, Miriam managed to tug her mother into a prone position. She fanned her and talked to

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

her, and when she saw she wasn't going to wake up or move, she looked at the faces above her in sudden terror.

"Oh, please help me. We're alone here. She'll be all right, I think, once we get her inside. She's never fainted before. Please, somone get a doctor." The faces looked interested, but nobody moved. Almost crying, Miriam said, "Oh, no, never mind. Just help me get her to the car. If she isn't all right in a few miles, I'll take her to a doctor." Then, frantically, "I just want to get out of here!"

"Why, honey, you don't need to do that. Don't you worry." A shambling, balding, pleasant man in his forties knelt beside her and put his hand on her shoulder. "We'll have her diagnosed and started on a cure in no time. Can you tell me what's been her trouble?"

"Not so far, Doctor."

"I'm not a doctor, honey."

"Not so far," she said dazedly, "except she's been awfully hot." (Two women in the background nodded at each other knowingly.) "I thought it was the weather, but I guess it's fever." (The crowd was waiting.) "And she has an open place on her foot—got it while we were sight-seeing in Tallahassee."

"Well, honey, maybe we'd better look at it." The shoe came off and when it did, the men and women moved even closer, clucking and whispering about the wet, raw sore.)

"If we could just get back to Queens," Miriam said. "If we could just get home, I know everything would be all right."

"Why, we'll have her diagnosed before you know it." The shambling man got up from his knees. "Anybody here had anything like this recently?" The men and women conferred in whispers.

"Well," one man said, "Harry Parkins' daughter had a fever like that; turned out to be pneumonia, but she never had nothin' like that on her foot. I reckon she ought to have antibiotics for that fever."

"Why, I had somethin' like that on my arm." A woman amputee was talking. "Wouldn't go away and wouldn't go away. Said I woulda died, if they hadn't of done this." She waved the stump.

"We don't want to do anything like that yet. Might not even be the same thing," the bald man said. "Anybody else?"

"Might be tetanus."

"Could be typhoid, but I don't think so."

"Bet it's some sort of staflococcus infection."

"Well," the bald man said, "since we don't seem to be able to prescribe just now, guess we'd better put her on the square. Call your friends when you get home tonight, folks, and see if any of them know about it; if not, we'll just have to depend on tourists."

"All right, Herman."

"G'by, Herman."

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

"See ya, Herman."

"G'by."

The mother, who had come to during the dialogue and listened with terrified fascination, gulped a potion and a glass of water the druggist had brought from across the street. From the furniture store came the messenger boy with a thin mattress. Someone else brought a couple of sheets, and the remainder of the crowd carried her into the square and put her down not far from the woman who had the lady-trouble.

When Miriam last saw her mother, she was talking drowsily to the woman, almost ready to let the drug take her completely.

Frightened but glad to be away from the smell of sickness, Miriam followed Herman Clark down a side street. "You can come home with me, honey," he said. "I've got a daughter just about your age, and you'll be well taken care of until that mother of yours gets well." Miriam smiled, reassured, used to following her elders. "Guess you're wondering about our little system," Clark said, hustling her into his car. "What with specialization and all, doctors got so they were knowin' so little, askin' so much, chargin' so much. Here in Babylon, we found we don't really need 'em. Practically everybody in this town has been sick one way or another, and what with the way women like to talk about their operations, we've learned a lot about treatment. We don't need doctors any more. We just benefit by other people's experience."

"Experience?" None of this was real, Miriam was sure, but Clark had the authoritative air of a long-time parent, and she knew parents were always right.

"Why, yes. If you had chicken pox, and were out where everybody in town could see you, pretty soon somebody'd come along who had had it. They'd tell you what you had, and tell you what they did to get rid of it. Wouldn't even have to pay a doctor to write the prescription. Why, I used Silas Lapham's old nerve tonic on my wife when she had her bad spell. She's fine now; didn't cost us a cent except for the tonic. This way, if you're sick, we put you in the square, and you stay there until somebody happens by who's had your symptoms; then you just try his cure. Usually works fine. If not, somebody else'll be by. Course, we can't let any of the sick folks leave the square until they're well; don't want anybody else catchin' it."

"How long will it take?"

"Well, we'll try some of the stuff Maysie Campbell used—and Gilyard Pinckney's penicillin prescription. If that doesn't work, we may have to wait till a tourist happens through."

"But what makes the tourists ask and suggest?"

"Have to. It's the law. You come on home with me, honey, and

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

we'll try to get your mother well."

Miriam met Clark's wife and Clark's family. For the first week, she wouldn't unpack her suitcases. She was sure they'd be leaving soon, if she could just hold out. They tried Asa Whitleaf's tonic on her mother, and doctored her foot with the salve Harmon Johnson gave his youngest when she had boils. They gave her Gilyard Pinckney's penicillin prescription.

"She doesn't seem much better," Miriam said to Clark one day. "Maybe if I could get her to Richmond or Atlanta to the hospital—"

"We couldn't let her out of Babylon until she's well, honey. Might carry it to other cities. Besides, if we cure her, she won't send county health nurses back, trying to change our methods. And it might be bad for her to travel. You'll get to like it here, hon."

That night Miriam unpacked. Monday she got a job clerking in the dime store.

"You're the new one, huh?" The girl behind the jewelry counter moved over to her, friendly, interested. "You Waited yet? No, I guess not. You look too young yet."

"No, I've never waited on people. This is my first job," Miriam said confidentially.

"I didn't mean *that* kind of wait," the girl said with some scorn. Then, seemingly irrelevantly, "You're from a pretty big town, I hear. Probably already laid with boys and everything. Won't have to Wait."

"What do you mean? I never have. Never! I'm a *good* girl!" Almost sobbing, Miriam ran back to the manager's office. She was put in the candy department, several counters away. That night she stayed up late with a road map and a flashlight, figuring, figuring.

The next day, the NO VISITORS sign was taken down from the tree in the park, and Miriam went to see her mother.

"I feel terrible, sweetie, you having to work in the dime store while I'm out here under these nice trees. Now you just remember all I told you, and don't let any of these town boys get fresh with you. Just because you have to work in the dime store doesn't mean you aren't a nice girl, and as soon as I can, I'm going to get you out of that job. Oh, I *wish* I was up and around."

"Poor Momma." Miriam smoothed the sheets and put a pile of movie magazines down by her mother's pillow. "How can you stand lying out her all day?"

"It isn't so bad, really. And y'know, that Whitleaf woman seems to know a little something about my trouble. I haven't really felt right since you were nine."

"Momma, I think we ought to get out of here. Things aren't right—"

"People certainly are being nice. Why, two of the ladies brought me some broth this morning."

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

Miriam felt like grabbing her mother and shaking her until she was willing to pick up her bedclothes and run with her. She kissed her goodby and went back to the dime store. Over their lunch, two of the counter girls were talking.

"I go next week. I want to marry Harry Phibbs soon, so I sure hope I won't be there too long. Sometimes it's three years."

"Oh, you're pretty, Donna. You won't have too long to Wait."

"I'm kind of scared. Wonder what it'll be like?"

"Yeah, wonder what it's like. I envy you."

Chilled for some reason, Miriam hurried past them to her counter, and began carefully rearranging marshmallow candies in the counter display.

That night, she walked to the edge of the town, along the road she and her mother had come in on. Ahead in the road, she saw two gaunt men standing, just where the dusty sign marked the city limits. She was afraid to go near them, and almost ran back to town, frightened, thinking. She loitered outside the bus station for some time, wondering how much a ticket out of the place would cost her. But of course she couldn't desert her mother. She was investigating the family car, still parked by the square, when Tommy Clark came up to her. "Time to go home, isn't it?" he asked, and they walked together back to his father's house.

"Momma, did you know it's almost impossible to get out of this town?" Miriam was at her mother's side, a week later.

"Don't get upset, sweetie. I know it's tough on you, having to work in the dime store, but that won't be forever. Why don't you look around for a little nicer job, dear?"

"Mamma, I don't *mean* that. I want to go home! Look, I've got an idea. I'll get the car keys from your bag here, and tonight, just before they move you all into the courthouse to sleep, we'll run for the car and get away."

"Dear," her mother sighed gently. "You know I can't move."

"Oh mother, can't you *try?*"

"When I'm a little stronger, dear, then maybe we'll try. The Pinckney woman is coming tomorrow with her daughter's herb tea. That should pep me up a lot. Listen, why don't you arrange to be down here? She has the best-looking son! —Miriam, you come right back here and kiss me goodby."

Tommy Clark had started meeting Miriam for lunch. They'd taken in one movie together, walking home hand in hand in an incredible pink dusk. On the second date, Tommy had tried to kiss her, but she'd said, "Oh, Tommy, I don't know the Babylon rules," because she knew it wasn't good to kiss a boy she didn't know very well. Handing Tommy half her

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

peanut-butter sandwich, Miriam said, "Can we go to the ball game tonight? The American Legion's playing."

"Not tonight, kid. It's Margy's turn to go."

"What do you mean, turn to go?"

"Oh," Tommy blushed. "You know."

That afternoon, right after she finished work, Tommy picked her up and they went to the party given for Herman Clark's oldest daughter. Radiant, Margy was dressed in white. It was her eighteenth birthday. At the end of the party, just when it began to get dark, Margy and her mother left the house. "I'll bring some stuff out in the truck tomorrow morning, honey," Clark said. "Take care of yourself." "Goodby." "G'by." "Happy Waitin', Margy!"

"Tommy, where is Margy going?" Something about the party and something in Margy's eyes frightened Miriam.

"Oh, you know. Where they all go. But don't worry." Tommy took her hand. "She'll be back soon. She's pretty."

In the park the next day, Miriam whispered in her mother's ear, "Momma, it's been almost a month now. Please, please, we *have* to go! Won't you please try to go with me?" She knelt next to her, talking urgently. "The car's been taken. I went back to check it over last night, and it was gone. But I sort of think, if we could get out on the highway, we could get a ride. Momma, we've got to get out of here." Her mother sighed a little, and stretched. "You always said you never wanted me to be a bad girl, didn't you, Momma?"

The older woman's eyes narrowed.

"You aren't letting that Clark boy take advantage—"

"No, Momma. No. That's not it at all. I just think I've heard something horrible. I don't even want to talk about it. It's some sort of law. Oh, Momma, please. I'm scared."

"Now, sweetie, you know there's nothing to worry about. Pour me a little water, won't you dear? You know, I think they're going to cure me yet. Helva Smythe and Margaret Box have been coming in to see me every day, and they've brought some penicillin pills in hot milk that I think are really doing me some good."

"But Momma, I'm scared."

"Now, dear, I've seen you going past with that nice Clark boy. The Clarks are a good family, and you're lucky to be staying with them. You just play your cards right, and remember: be a good girl."

"Momma, we've got to get out."

"You just calm down, young lady. Now go back and be nice to that Tommy Clark. Helva Smythe says he's going to own his daddy's business some day. You might

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

bring him out here to see me tomorrow."

"Momma!"

"I've decided. They're making me better, and we're going to stay here until I'm well. People may not pay you much attention in a big city, but you're really somebody in a small town." She smoothed her blankets complacently, and settled down to sleep.

That night, Miriam sat with Tommy Clark in his front porch swing. They'd started talking a lot to each other, about everything. ". . . so I guess I'll have to go into the business," Tommy was saying. "I'd kind of like to go to Wesleyan or Clemson or something, but Dad says I'll be better off right here, in business with him. Why won't they ever let us do what we want to do?"

"I don't know, Tommy. Mine wants me to go to Katherine Gibbs —that's a secretarial school in New York, and get a typing job this fall."

"You won't like that much, will you?"

"Uh uh. Except now, I'm kind of anxious to get back up there—you know, get out of this town."

"You don't like it here?" Tommy's face clouded. "You don't like me?"

"Oh, Tommy, I like you fine. But I'm pretty grown up now, and I'd like to get back to New York and start in on a job. Why, I got out of high school last month."

"No kidding. You only look about fifteen."

"Aw, I do not. I'll be eighteen next week—oh, I didn't want to tell you. I don't want your folks to have to do anything about my birthday. Promise you won't tell them."

"You'll be eighteen, huh. Ready for the Wait yourself. Boy, I sure wish *I* didn't know you!"

"Tommy! What do you mean? Don't you like me?"

"That's just the point. I *do* like you. A lot. If I were a stranger, I could break your Wait."

"Wait? What kind of wait?"

"Oh" (he blushed) "you know."

A week later, after a frustrating visit with her mother in the park, Miriam came home to the Clarks' and dragged herself up to her room. Even her mother had forgotten her birthday. She wanted to fling herself on her pillow and sob until supper. She dropped on the bed, got up uneasily. A white, filmy, full-skirted dress hung on the closet door. She was frightened. Herman Clark and his wife bustled into the room, wishing her happy birthday. "The dress is for you." "You shouldn't have," she cried. Clark's wife shooed him out, and helped Miriam dress. She started downstairs, with the yards of white chiffon whispering and billowing about her ankles.

Nobody else at her birthday party

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

was particularly dressed up. Some of the older women in the neighborhood watched Tommy help Miriam cut the cake, moist-eyed. "She hardly seems old enough—" "Doubt if she'll have long to Wait." "Pretty little thing, wonder if Tommy likes her?" "Bet Herman Clark's son wished *he* didn't know her," they said. Uneasily, Miriam talked to them all, tried to laugh, choked down a little ice cream and cake.

"G'by, kid," Tommy said, and squeezed her hand. It was just beginning to get dark out.

"Where are you going, Tommy?"

"Nowhere, silly. I'll see you in a couple of weeks. May want to talk to you about something, if things turn out."

The men had slipped, one by one, from the room. Shadows were getting longer, but nobody in the birthday-party room had thought to turn on the lights. The women gathered around Miriam. Mrs. Clark, eyes shining, came close to her. "And here's the best birthday present of all," she said, holding out a big ball of brilliant blue string. Miriam looked at her, not understanding. She tried to stammer a thank-you. "Now, dear, come with me," Clark's wife said. Frightened, Miriam tried to bolt from the room. Clark's wife and Helva Smythe caught her by the arms, and gently led her out of the house, down the gray street. "I'm going to see if we can get you staked out near Margy," she said. They started off into the August twilight.

When they came to the field, Miriam first thought the women were still busy at a late harvest, but she saw that the maidens, scores of them, were just sitting on little boxes at intervals in the seemingly endless field. There were people in the bushes at the field's edge; Miriam saw them. Every once in a while one of the men would start off, following one of the brilliantly colored strings toward the woman who sat at the end of it, in a white dress, waiting. Frightened, Miriam turned to Mrs. Clark. "Why am I here? Why? Mrs. Clark, explain!"

"Poor child's a little nervous. I guess we all were, when it happened to us," Clark's wife said to Helva Smythe. "It's all right, dear, you just stand here at the edge and watch for a little while, until you get used to the idea. Remember, the man must be a stranger. We'll be out with the truck with food for you and Margy during visitors' time Sunday. That's right. And when you go out there, try to stake out near Margy. It'll make the Wait nicer for you."

"*What* wait?"

"The Wait of the Virgins, dear. Goodby."

Dazed, Miriam stood at the edge of the great, domed field, watching the little world criss-crossed by hundreds of colored cords. She

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

moved a little closer, trying to hide her cord under her skirts, trying not to look like one of them. Two men started toward her, one handsome, one unshaven and hideous, but when they saw she had not yet entered the field, they dropped back, waiting. Sitting near her, she saw one of the dime-store clerks, who had quit her job two weeks back and had suddenly disappeared. She was fidgeting nervously, casting hot eyes at a young man ranging the edge of the field. As Miriam watched, the young man strode up her cord, without speaking, threw money into her lap. Smiling, the dime-store girl stood up, and the two went off into the bushes. The girl nearest Miriam, a harelip with incredibly ugly skin, looked up from the half-finished sweater she was knitting.

"Well, there goes another one," she said to Miriam. "Pretty ones always go first. I reckon one day there won't be any pretty ones here, and then I'll go." She shook out her yarn. "This is my fortieth sweater." Not understanding, Miriam shrank away from the ugly girl. "I'd even be glad for old Fats there," she was saying. She pointed to a lewd-eyed old man hovering near. "Trouble is, even old Fats goes for the pretty ones. Heh! You ought to see it, when he goes up to one of them high-school queens. Heh! Law says they can't say no!" Choking with curiosity, stiff, trembling, Miriam edged up to the girl.

"Where . . . where do they go?"

The harelip looked at her suspiciously. Her white dress, tattered and white no longer, stank. "Why, you really don't know, do you?" She pointed to a place near them, where the bushes swayed. "To lay with them. It's the law."

"Momma! Mommamommamomma!" With her dress whipping at her legs, Miriam ran into the square. It was just before the time when the sick were taken to sleep in the hall of the courthouse.

"Why dear, how pretty you look!" the mother said. Then, archly, "They always say, wear white when you want a man to propose."

"Momma, we've got to get out of here." Miriam was crying for breath.

"I thought we went all over that."

"Momma, you always said you wanted me to be a good girl. Not ever to let any man take advan—"

"Why dear, of course I did."

"Momma, don't you see! You've got to help me—we've got to get out of here, or somebody *I don't even know* . . . Oh, Momma, please. I'll help you walk. I saw you practicing the other day, with Mrs. Pinckney helping you."

"Now dear, you just sit down here and explain to me. Be calm."

"Momma, *listen!* There's something every girl here has to do when she's eighteen. You know how they don't use doctors here,

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

for anything?" Embarrassed, she hesitated. "Well, you remember when Violet got married, and she went to Dr. Dix for a checkup?"

"Yes, dear—now calm down, and tell Momma."

"Well, it's sort of a *checkup*, don't you see, only its like graduating from high school too, and it's how they ... see whether you're any good."

"What on earth are you trying to tell me?"

"Momma, you have to go to this field, and sit there, and sit there until a man throws money in your lap. *Then you have to go into the bushes and lie with a stranger!*" Hysterical, Miriam got to her feet, started tugging at the mattress.

"You just calm down. Calm down!"

"But mother, I want to do like you told me. I want to be good!"

Vaguely, her mother started talking. "You said you were dating that nice Clark boy? His father is a real-estate salesman. Good business, dear. Just think, you might not even have to work—"

"Oh, Momma!"

"And when I get well, I could come live with you. They're very good to me here—it's the first time I've found people who really *cared* what was wrong with me. And if you were married to that nice, solid boy, who seems to have such a *good* job with his father, why we could have a lovely house together, the three of us."

"Momma, we've got to get *out* of here. I can't do it. I just *can't*." The girl had thrown herself on the grass again.

Furious, her mother lashed out at her. "Miriam. Miriam Elise Holland. I've fed you and dressed you and paid for you and taken care of you ever since your father died. And you've always been selfish, selfish, selfish. Can't you ever do anything for me? First I want you to go to secretarial school, to get a nice opening, and meet nice people, and you don't want to do that. Then you get a chance to settle in a good town, with a *nice* family, but you don't even want that. You only think about yourself. Here I have a chance to get well at last, and settle down in a really nice town, where good families live, and see you married to the right kind of boy." Rising on her elbows, she glared at the girl. "Can't you ever do anything for *me*?"

"Momma, Momma, you don't *understand!*"

"I've known about the Wait since the first week we came here." The woman leaned back on her pillow. "Now pour me a glass of water and go back and do whatever Mrs. Clark tells you."

"Mother!"

Sobbing, stumbling, Miriam ran out of the square. First she started toward the edge of town, running. She got to the edge of the highway, where the road signs were, and saw the two shabby, shambling men,

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

apparently in quiet evening conversation by the street post. She doubled back and started across a neatly plowed field. Behind her, she saw the Pinckney boys. In front of her, the Campbells and the Dodges started across the field. When she turned back toward town, trembling, they walked past her, ignoring her, on some business of their own. It was getting dark.

She wandered the fields for most of the night. Each one was blocked by a Campbell or a Smythe or a Pinckney; the big men carried rifles and flashlights, and called out cheerfully to each other when they met, and talked about a wild fox hunt. She crept into the Clarks' place when it was just beginning to get light out, and locked herself in her room. No one in the family paid attention to her storming and crying as she paced the length and width of the room.

That night, still in the bedraggled, torn white dress, Miriam came out of the bedroom and down the stairs. She stopped in front of the hall mirror to put on lipstick and repair her hair. She tugged at the raveled sleeves of the white chiffon top. She started for the place where the virgins Wait. At the field's edge, Miriam stopped, shuddered as she saw the man called Old Fats watching her. A few yards away she saw another man, young, lithe, with bright hair, waiting. She sighed as she watched one woman, with a tall, loose boy in jeans, leave the field and start for the woods.

She tied her string to a stake at the edge of the great, domed field. Threading her way among the many, bright-colored strings, past waiting girls in white, she came to a stop in a likely-looking place and took her seat.

HELP WANTED —

Because of the recent upheaval in newsstand distribution, many dealers are not being adequately supplied with copies of FANTASY & SCIENCE FICTION.

If your dealer does not have it, you will be doing a real service for us—for the dealer—and perhaps for yourself, if you will send us his name and address. We will make sure that your dealer will be kept supplied in the future. Write to:

Newsdealer Service
FANTASY & SCIENCE FICTION
527 Madison Avenue, New York 22, N. Y.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

Victoria Endicott Lincoln was born in Fall River, Mass., and has contributed her own bit to the Fall River Legend. When her mother forbade little Victoria to visit with the solitary spinster next door, the child wanted to know why. "Miss Borden," said Mrs. Lincoln firmly, "was not kind to her parents." As a writer, Miss Lincoln has been far from prolific since the sensational success of FEBRUARY HILL *in 1934; but her words have been as faultlessly chosen as her mother's on that occasion. I'm indebted to William Lurie, of Silver Spring, Maryland, for directing my attention to this (I believe) sole Lincoln fantasy—a fine fresh variation on the doubleganger theme, which has never appeared in any magazine.*

No Evidence

by VICTORIA LINCOLN

THE FUNNY THING IS THAT FOR SOME twenty years after the night he sat there and watched himself walk away, in fact right up to the summer that the nightmares and the coughing began, the whole thing bothered Charley Johnson less than you would have believed possible.

To begin with, he had of course assumed that the whole business was itself a dream, a drunken hallucination. It is easy, after all, to disbelieve the impossible. And then, after the shock when he got his first letter from himself, the letter in his own hand, posted from Ireland and asking for money, somehow or other, he had just accepted it.

He couldn't have told you why he took it like that; it was surprising, in a way it was fully as surprising as the event itself: but that was how it was. After the first jolt, his mind just clicked and said quietly, "Be damned, it was so then"; and that was all there was to it.

Besides, there hadn't been many of those letters anyway. Not more than four or five in the past twenty years, and none of them striking him for more than what you could consider a modest, reasonable touch, under the circumstances.

Settled down, too, apparently, with no intention of ever coming back or making trouble for himself. They all came from Leith. The

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

Emerald Isle. That was one hell of a place for any part of me to have gone back to, he thought, remembering a childhood of draughts and smoky fires and quarrelsome women and not enough to eat. Many was the time, even in the orphanage in Chicago, that he'd blessed poor Aunt Belle's soul for dragging him out of it, when his mother died of drink.

Well, that was the way it was. At first he didn't believe it. And then, freely granted that it was a damned queer thing to get used to, there was no getting around it that he'd felt fine all the time since it happened—the hell of a lot better than he'd ever felt before the event. And he was better, too. People noticed. He'd sure fooled them, they'd say, the way he'd panned out, a crazy kid like him. And he'd laugh it off, with, "Oh, well, prohibition, all of us back then..." It didn't even bother him when his wife would say, "I wish you didn't work so hard, Charley. You know, you're getting to be a terribly one-sided person." Because, in point of fact, that had always been the hell of it, before that night. Being, that is to say, such a thoroughly two-sided person.

Not that it had ever been really out of hand since the time when he was four and drowned the cat. He'd never forgot that, how he was crying all the time and trying to tell himself right up to its last meow and gulp that it was just a game and he'd pull it out in the end, poor thing; and knowing that the part of him that wanted it to drown had his mind made up and wouldn't be stopped, for once.

No, it had never been out of hand that way again. There were only the black rages ("Sure the kid gets just out of himself, sometimes ...") and the spells when he'd have a roomful in tempests of laughter, never knowing what he'd say next. And there were the fits of drawing pictures. He could always draw, neat, draughtsman's sketches of whatever was set before him; he could even catch a fair likeness of a face; but these pictures were different. One way they were a lot better, you might say, and one way worse; half the lines left out and the rest all sharp and jagged, and still something to them, if it was only something that made you crumple them up sharp and throw them in the trash.

But the worst of it hadn't been the rages, or the laughing fits, or the queer pictures, but simply the way he'd always had such a time making up his mind.

"Oh, come off it, Charley," he had once said to himself aloud, "you and I both know better than that."

It struck the friends who heard him very funny. It was years before they would let it die. Years, indeed, after the night when the thing happened that changed it all.

It was during prohibition.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

Charley had his first job with the company whose general manager he ultimately became, the pressed-wood people in Urbana. Marie had her eye on him, even then. She wore glasses, and had the greatest scorn for people who split an infinitive; but she had a handsome bosom, and her father was first cousin to the boss. But the night it happened she had a cold, so he went along stag; and God knows what they used to pass off for gin, back then.

He had a stick of charcoal in his pocket that he'd been using up at the plant that afternoon, marking off lengths of lumber, and the first thing he knew he was drawing on the wall. Hardly more than a mess of jagged lines, and still you saw that it was a crowd of wild horses running, with a fire behind them. The man who owned the joint had just paid good money to have it redecorated, and he was as sore as a boil. He'd thrown them all out. Only, on the way, Charley managed to swipe a quart of his damned bathtub gin and hide it under his overcoat.

He meant to split it with the bunch, but outside they'd got to fighting among themselves, and the next thing he remembered he'd walked off alone and ended up behind a signboard out on the edge of town. There was a light snow on the ground, and it was a cold night.

He sat down and settled himself to serious drinking. When he looked up and saw himself first, he took it quite easy.

God, he thought, now I'm seeing double.

It was sometime later, and after another pull, that it occurred to him that when you see double you don't generally include yourself in the view.

The first faint light of dawn was around him. He let himself lean back against the signboard and stared up at himself.

God, he thought oddly, it's the short little feller I am.

And at once he was sober, deathly sick, but sober.

"Go away," he had said.

And his self had looked at him.

"I'm going," the other one said. "Do you think I need coaxing? I've waited for this minute long enough."

And he walked away, swaying a little, clearly the worse for several over the line, and still with a kind of swagger.

When Charley woke, an hour or so later, he saw footprints in the snow. There were his own, coming in to the spot where he still huddled; and then there were his own again, but beginning at an easy stride from him, circling and blurring themselves as if he had stood around waiting for something, and then making a straight line for the road. Charley looked at them.

"I'm not drunk now," he said.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

Then he vomited and fell asleep again.

When he woke, the snow had melted.

He took the next bus back to town and had himself admitted to the hospital with something that went down on the books as virus pneumonia. He was unconscious for the better part of a week, but when he came to, he felt fine. And by the end of the year, he had not only married Marie, but come to respect and even to begin to emulate her grammar.

His advancement with the company was slow but steady. When the first letter came he had been more than able to meet its request.

Still, it was curious how quietly he had accepted its coming.

"What's the self-addressed envelope from Ireland?" asked his wife, handing it to him. He had always written an oddly distinctive hand, half printed, with marked breaks between the syllables. And though he had known at once what the thing was, his mind had not revolted at the knowledge, nor had he found it hard to control his voice as he thrust the letter, unopened, into an inner pocket.

"Just a wholesaler's list for the firm," he said, and waited for her to ask where he got the funny, thin envelope. But she did not ask. She was a highly incurious and unobservant woman.

He went to the bathroom and locked himself in. The letter was brief and to the point. He wished to inform himself that the woman he lived with was pregnant and had been fired from her job. He could only get work by the day, himself, and not enough of that, having a bad name as a drunk. Besides, his chest had never been right since they parted company. Two hundred and fifty bucks would take care of food and rent until the old lady could get back into circulation.

That was all. No apologies, no threats. Only the letter, there in his hands, proof that a thing that could not have happened had happened. He tore it across and started to flush it down the toilet, thought better of it, and replaced it in his coat pocket. The next day he took it to the bank and hired a separate safe-deposit box. For he might need legal help, sometime, you couldn't tell what the other one might do; and it would be the hell of a note if he tried to get it and ended up in the nut-house. The letter was proof, wasn't it? Surely any good graphologist would know it was proof.

The caution, however, had been excessive. In twenty years he received only four letters more, and none of them offered any trouble at all. He, the other one, was poor, but he seemed to take it for granted, back in Leith. His old woman's husband died, and they got married. The kid was stillborn. From time to time he sold a cartoon to a local paper. He went to

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

night classes at an art school and learned how to make woodcuts. The last letter was all about them.

"It's my whole work and everything to me now, Charley. It was hard getting rid of you and hard living like I have, but now I know what it was all about, I got no complaints. These woodcuts, they're on the order of an old dance of death and they show all the ways that we take to kill ourselves and each other. From booze to war, it's all there. I never was one to find words, but I sure as hell can cut it into wood.

"If only my chest will hold out for me till they're done, it's already got me spitting blood. If you could see your way to send something so I and the old woman could spend the winter warm and dry. Do you remember that picture we drew on the wall, the fire and the horses running? That's the way this will be. How can I say it, Charley, so you'll get it, the way this thing is turning out, the way it shows up the hopelessness? Well, do you remember how you felt the day the two of us drowned the cat?"

The request was unfortunately put. Charley Johnson had never, on the conscious level at least, been an imaginative man, and he had a short memory; but he had always remembered that cat. He had *liked* that damned cat.

"The hell with him," he said aloud. "I can't make head or tail of this mess, but if that's what his pictures are like, the sooner his chest gives out on him, the better."

He did not put the letter in the safe-deposit box with the others. He carried it around with him all day, and that night, when he was alone, he drew a line through the address and wrote across the envelope in an unsteady, feminine hand: *Deceased, return to sender.* Then he resealed it with sticking tape and carried it down to the mailbox at the corner. He felt a weight drop from him as he heard the box click. When he came back to his house, he was laughing.

His wife was in the hall.

"What's the joke, Charley?"

He gave her a friendly slap. "I feel good. I just put over a deal."

"You," she said fondly.

Ten days later, for the first time, he cried out in his sleep. And after that, there was not a night that the dream did not come.

It was always the same. The room was cold, the fire smoked. The chisel was heavier and heavier in his hand; his arm ached, way up deep into the shoulder. And the woman with the white face and the black, stringy hair was always standing over him, begging him to stop, to put it by, to get into bed.

"Ah, God forgive ye," she'd say, over and over. "Can't ye see that it's no better than a sin to God, the thing you're killing yourself for? Ah. God help ye, the terrible things that's in your head."

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

Charley had never remembered his dreams before, and even these he remembered only dimly. He went about his business with his usual even cheer, he played his daily round of golf after work, though now, toward the end of it, he tired and had a disproportionate ache in his arms and chest.

"Slowing up," he said. "The old boy ain't what he used to be."

And then he began to cough in his sleep. He had a doctor look him over, but he could find nothing wrong. He tried sleeping on pillows, but it made no difference. He moved into the guest room so that Marie could get her sleep, but even there he wakened her and kept her awake. It frightened her, too, because she could not waken him from that nightmare coughing, not even with a cold, wet washrag on his face.

And one morning, at breakfast, she began to cry.

"You were so terrible, last night," she said.

He looked at her, the neat, hairdresser-dressed head, the face so childlike and disorganized. Through the years he had grown very fond of her.

"Poor kid, the coughing again?"

"You talked in your sleep."

He smiled, kidding her, but kindly.

"Was that worse?"

She spoke very slowly and remotely, as if she were remembering a story that someone had told her, a story of the utmost terror and still, somehow, a thing that did not concern her personally.

"Your voice was more Irish," she said, "the way it used to be when you were a kid, I guess. And it sounded sort of drunk, too, and weak ... as if you were sick. And your eyes were open, but they didn't see. Like dead eyes."

"Well? What did I say?"

"You said, 'I can't die before it's done. It's got to be in the world after me, for evidence.'"

He laughed again, still trying to kid her out of it.

"Is that all? I thought from your face I'd been giving my love-life away."

She did not even seem to hear him. She took off her glasses and polished them slowly with her napkin as she spoke. Her voice was unchanged, low and remote and still charged with that same impersonal terror.

"I said, 'Evidence of what, Charley?' and you said, 'Hopeless, hopeless ... We are the horses stampeding, but we're the fire, too. This is the evidence. I was turned loose from that fool, I was sent into this world, to save it from the confusion of hope. Let nothing happen to these things, do you hear? They will be found in time. They will do their work. They will destroy human hope.'"

He stared at her.

"How in the world do you remember a mess like that?"

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

And she looked into his face.

"Charley, listen. I know you were kind of a wild kid. Look, if there's anything you ever did, anything terrible, anything you feel you could never tell anybody... I'd still love you, Charley."

It was ridiculous, but it was touching. He teased her only because he could think of nothing else to do.

"Well, once when I was a kid I drowned a cat."

"Oh, Charley, don't laugh at me." But she had snapped out of it, she had begun to laugh a little herself. "Of course it doesn't make sense, here in the morning, the sun shining... that stuff about horses. Oh, Charley, when I just look at your nice *plain* face..."

But when he was alone, he felt the dream, or something of it, begin to come to him. And that day, at lunch time, he went to the bank and cashed a check, and then to the post office, where he made out a money order and sent it to Ireland. And that afternoon, when a friend asked him why he was looking so down in the mouth, he made his first original joke in twenty years.

"I don't know," he said, "I was just feeling sort of sorry for myself."

That night he dreamed again, and for the last time.

He was lying on the bed in the draughty, smoky room, and the woman was looking down at him.

"He's gone," she said. "With the poor eyes staring wide open in his head, he's gone, God pity him."

He tried to speak. He tried to say, "I'm alive, I see you, I hear you, I'm not dead."

But his lips, his eyes would not move. By no terrible effort could he change that look of still, deep pity on the haggard face that bent above him.

She turned from him and went to the grate. She stirred the fire.

"The poor soul," she was whispering. "The poor, tormented soul. God rest him, wherever he is now. And he was good to me, too, even when the poor brains had gone back on him entirely."

She shook her head. There was no grief in her face, only relief and tenderness. She looked at him as a mother might look at a sick child who has fallen, at last, into healing sleep.

"At least I stuck by him to the end," she said, "even when he never said a word that made sense from one day to the next, only to be digging at that wood."

Once more he made a terrible, a superhuman effort to stir his lips, his eyes.

Her own lips smiled.

"Ah," she whispered, "it's a strange thing with some people, how there's no sense to love. Like he was my own kid that I had to take care of, it was. And he's gone."

And quietly, almost absently, as

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

if the thing she was doing were of no moment, she began to throw the chips and the woodblocks, together, on the fire.

"I may as well make the place halfway decent before they come for him," she said. "Tidy it up a bit. He won't care any more now, the poor soul. Not any more."

But though the dream had ended, Charley Johnson did not wake until morning.

"You had a good night," Marie said at breakfast. "You didn't cough, or anything."

He answered, "Glad of that." But his voice was flat, without vitality.

He saw no reason to doubt the truth of the dream as he so perfectly, minutely, dreadfully remembered it. He drove not to the office but to the bank, where he opened the safe-deposit box and took out the letters. He went to the edge of town, stopped the car, and burned them, without reading them once again, by the roadside.

Then he got back into the car.

He looked directly before him, through the windshield, and spoke aloud.

"It shouldn't have happened," he said quietly, "any of it. And now it did not happen. Now, if it should ever begin to get to me, if I should ever be crazy enough to try and tell about it, I'll land where someone that crazy belongs, and no harm will be done."

He started the car and headed back toward the office. He was surprised to notice that he felt good, better, actually, than he had felt for months. The aching fatigue was entirely gone from his arm and shoulder, the pain from his chest. But while he was conscious of a vast relief, a profound sense of physical well-being, his face remained serious; his rather vapid, good-natured smile had not yet come back to it.

It is always a rather sobering experience to realize that one is half dead.

MYSTERY LOVER'S BONANZA!
while they last — 10 books for $1.00

We're bursting the seams up at our Concord, N. H., warehouse. Our printers tell us our supply of Mercury Books there *must* go to provide space for new stock.

That's why we're making a bonanza offer to readers of MMB-M: here's your chance to buy *10* copies of assorted Mercury, Bestseller and Jonathan Press Mysteries (all in good, readable condition) *for only $1.00,* a saving of $2.50 on the retail value!

But—don't wait till we run out of copies. Send your dollar today to: *Bonanza, MERCURY MYSTERY BOOKS,* 527 Madison Ave., N. Y. 22

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

Miss Seabright chooses her title from MACBETH, *and tells of a future which has learned (to quote another part of that play) to minister to a mind diseased, pluck from the memory a rooted sorrow, raze out the written troubles of the brain with some sweet oblivious antidote. But even in that world, the patient, if he is to retain his manhood and his humanity, must still minister to himself—and possibly even throw physic to the dogs.*

The Death of Each Day

by IDRIS SEABRIGHT

TOWARD SUNSET THEY WOULD become dimly aware of how long they had been fighting and how tired they were. Under the plastic casts and the cosmetic dressings their wounds would begin to smell. They fired their atomic cannon more at random, they spoke infrequently. Their breathing became shallower. The effects of the previous night's therapy were wearing off.

They always found this frightening; and, as soon as the sun sank—the convention that there should be no attacks at night was one of the most rigidly observed of the Limited War—they would hurry eagerly away from the lead-shielded, concrete-reinforced gun emplacement toward the city's lower levels.

There the therapy they needed was waiting for them. There the fighters would find iatrobots, tranquilizers, memory suppressors, and heavy doses of hypnotherapy. Best of all, at the end of the therapeutic sessions, they would be issued the two capsules of Nedradorm that would assure each of them his seven hours of dreamless sleep.

Denton was no less eager for his surcease tonight than the others were. It had been a hard day, with something odd about it that he couldn't quite place. Yet as he limped away from his station—he was the captain of a gun crew—he hesitated. Miriam, his girl, had been wounded recently when one of the enemy shells had exploded near her. She was still his girl, though he hadn't been able to see much of her since the war had begun, and he wanted to visit her. She'd been in the hospital, let's see,

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

it must be three days now. He couldn't remember exactly when she *had* been hurt. Of course she'd be back at her station in a day or two. But he'd like to see her tonight.

He could go to see her after he'd had his therapy. He'd be rested then. More like himself. But he felt somehow that he'd like to see her *before* he was rested and refreshed.

He'd go now.

The escalator had been damaged by a robot bomber a day or two before. The gun crew had to walk down a couple of flights before they could find one that still worked. Denton went with them, but at the second level he took a slow-moving mobile sidewalk that went slanting down to the fourth level, where the hospital was.

It was not quite dark yet. Long shafts of tawny light struck down across the sidewalk from the upper levels at the intersections, and heavy dust motes danced in them. Denton was surprised at how few people were riding the walk. The evacuation of civilians must have been more extensive than he had realized.

He stopped at a flower stall on the corner near the hospital, meaning to buy Miriam a bouquet. You always took a sick person flowers. But there was no attendant at the stall, and the flowers in the green tin vases were nothing but dry, colorless mops. They looked as if they had been standing there for a month. The gardenias in the glass case were brown humps.

It was too bad. He sighed and chewed his lip. The gracious life was one of the things they were fighting for. And besides, he'd wanted to take her something. But in the early days of a war, some things had to get left out.

There was a robot attendant on duty at the hospital admitting desk. It surprised Denton that he was surprised. Hadn't he thought that there would be an attendant? But the robot told him where Miriam was readily enough.

He walked down the dimly-lighted corridor toward ward B-6. The familiar hospital smell came to his nose. It was tinged with something else, a heavy, sickly smell, that he couldn't identify. He opened the door of the ward.

It was a ten-bed ward, but as far as he could see, only two beds were occupied. Good, that meant casualties weren't heavy. He walked hesitantly toward the bed to the right, where he thought he recognized the outline of Miriam's head on the pillow. The lighting was poor.

"Miriam?" he asked. The whole right side of her face was swathed in bandages.

After a moment she said, "Yes?"

"It's Dick." He pulled up a chair to her bed. "How are you, dear?" It seemed to him some of the heavy smell was coming from her bed.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

"Dick!" She turned her face toward him. "So you came at last."

He was puzzled. "At last? Why, dear, it's only been a couple of days."

"Is that what you think?" She laughed a little. "I suppose that's because you've been having your therapy. No, I've been lying here for more than a month. I didn't think you'd ever come."

"But—" He'd better change the subject. "Are they taking good care of you?" The moment he had asked the question, he felt it was unwise.

"Not any more," she answered drearily. "Not after the first week. I guess they think there's not much use in it."

He shifted uneasily in his chair. She must be fancying it. And yet, that heavy smell... "Are they understaffed?" he wanted to know.

"I don't know. The attendants hardly ever come in here. I think perhaps they've been transferred to fighters' therapy.... I can't believe you're really here. I didn't think you'd come."

"Why wouldn't I come?" he asked a little angrily, pleased to have something to be angry about.

"Oh, the therapy. I know how fighters' therapy affects people. I had a lot of it when I was fighting."

"Don't you get therapy any more?" he asked, really shocked.

"No. Some days I don't even get fed. Some days I can't even keep my bed clean. Why should they waste therapy on me? I'm not a fighter any more. I'm going to..."

Her voice trailed away. But he knew, from the grieved and indignant bound his heart gave, what she had been going to say.

Oh, why had he come here directly from the gun emplacement? He should have had his treatment, or at least a tranquilizing pill, before he saw her. Then he'd have realized that what she was saying was no more than the fretful complaining of a sick person. Sick people always complained, they always found fault with their care. But as it was, it sounded dreadfully real. And at the back of his mind was the fear that if he kept on listening to her he would hear her say something that was almost worse than hearing her, his girl, say she was going to—to—

"No, you're not," he said loudly. "No, you're not."

"Why not?" she answered almost peevishly. "A lot of people have died."

"There's only one other patient in the ward. What do you mean?"

"It used to be full of them."

"You mean, when you first came here? There haven't been that many casualties. The war has only been going on for a few days."

"I can't talk much more," she said, closing her eyes. "You've had memory suppressors. I don't suppose you'll believe me. But the war has been going on for more than ten years."

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

He stared at her. After a moment, he pushed his chair back. He couldn't, he really couldn't, stay and listen to anything more. It frightened him too much.

"Goodby," he said loudly. "Goodby, Miriam."

She didn't answer him.

When he was out in the street again, he stood hesitating. If he hurried, he could make it to the clinic before the fighters' therapy department closed. And then he'd feel better, much better. He'd be able to realize how wrong and unreasonable Miriam was.

—He hadn't even kissed her. He hadn't even told her he wanted her to hurry and get well—

He began to walk. He knew he ought to take a mobile sidewalk to the clinic, but he kept limping along the static one. Well, no matter how late he was in getting to the clinic, he could always have sleeping pills. After a good night, he'd be more normal again.

How empty the city was.

It had grown quite dark. Some of the street fluors had come on. In the gentle silvery light they gave, like moonlight diluted, Denton saw that shop after shop had been boarded up, or bomb-damaged, or merely left to emptiness. Nobody at all was about. His footsteps sounded light and hollow as he walked.

He passed a food store. It, at least, was lit up. But there were only two or three people in it.

It showed how efficiently the evacuation of the civilian population had been carried out.

His wounds, particularly the one on his thigh, had begun to smart. When he had to detour around heaps of rubble, he resented it. Then there came a heap so big it blocked the street. He couldn't detour, he had to scramble over it. It was a heap of bricks, plaster and plastic, with flat jagged pieces on top that must, from their shape, be glass, though they were so heavily coated with dust that it was impossible to say. They must have been lying there a long t—

Sweat was pouring down him. He realized that he was badly frightened.—The glass must have been lying there a long time to be so coated with dust. It must have been lying there . . .

. . . for nearly ten years.

Denton drew a deep breath. He tried to collect himself. All right. Suppose the war had been going on for as long as Miriam said. Suppose the fighters' therapy had taken each day away from them as it happened and left them with a perpetual present, a present in which the war had only just started and victory was distant only a few days.

All right. Was it really so serious? It had been done with good motives. It had enabled the fighters to bear up under fear and suffering that would otherwise have overwhelmed them. There must

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

have been times—he had a dim feeling that there *had* been times—when he had seen all those around him dying, touched with flame, suffering agonies. And yet none of the agony had touched him. He ought to be grateful for the healing therapy.

Whatever his people had suffered, the other side must have suffered equally. Denton's side was sure to win. Victory, by now, must in reality be distant only a few days.

He drew another deep breath. It was all right, he could stop being so frightened. He'd go on to the fighters' clinic and get his sleeping pills.

He walked a few paces. He stopped. He knew now why today's fighting had seemed so odd. There had been no enemy action, no enemy action at all, except for one short burst of gunfire earlier in the day.

It must be a trap. The enemy was clever. They must be planning—something . . . a major attack . . . .

He knew in his heart that it wasn't so. Enemy action had grown scantier day after day. There might be no one man of them yet left alive.

Denton's side was sure to win? Yes, perhaps it had already won. But there was no one left to win from any more.

He scrambled back over the rubble heap. His heart was pounding. When he got to the mobile walk's entrance, he hesitated. No, he could make better time on foot. He began to run.

Nobody stopped him. After the second block, the wound in his thigh broke. He felt the bloody fluid from it trickling down his leg. It hurt less than it had before. He ran on.

When he got to the hospital, he was panting and trembling. He had had a fighter's day, with little food and rest. But he jogged past the admitting desk, down the corridor, and into Miriam's ward.

The bed where the other woman had been was empty and stripped of its coverings. Miriam was the only one in the ward.

Now that he was here, he felt shy. "Miriam—" he said.

"*Dick!*" She raised her head from the pillow. "I've had a bath," she said. "They took the other woman away, and then they gave me a bath.—You didn't kiss me goodby."

"I know." He gathered her up in his arms and began kissing her. She was so much thinner and lighter than he remembered her that it made his heart ache, and her hair—hadn't her hair used to be a darker brown? Now it was almost ash-blond.

She clung to him laughing and trembling, while tears rolled down her cheeks. "I'm so glad you came," she said. "I thought I was just going to lie here by myself until . . .

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

"Do you know how long it's been since you kissed me, Dick? I know you don't remember. The therapy blurs things, and when each day is the first one, it doesn't matter what didn't happen the night before. But I can remember. It's been ten years."

He held her tightly, thinking how, when they had been lovers, she had never wanted to go to sleep unless she was touching him. She had used to wake in the night to touch him, to make sure he was still there. And yet they had slept apart in their narrow fighters' beds for a decade, sure that each day of separation was the first day.

"Do you remember that song I used to play on the guitar?" she asked. "About the man who was standing on the gallows? Everyone failed him — his father, his mother, his brothers—except his true-love. She brought the gold, she paid the fee, she saved him.

"I'm so glad you came back to kiss me, Dick. It makes it easier for me to . . . leave."

He put her down gently on the pillow, but he was angry. "No, you're *not*," he said.

"Not?"

"Not—what you said. Wait. Wait. I'll be back." He hurried out into the corridor.

All the same, it wasn't easy to find an iatrobot. The corridors, the wards he explored were empty. He found a storeroom full of broken and dismantled iatro-mechanisms, but he knew he was incapable of restoring one of them. He didn't even pass any attendants in the halls. And everywhere he went in the big ill-lighted building, he found the same faint heavy smell of uncleanness and decay.

At last, on the hospital's top floor, he found the operating theater. It was brightly lighted, the first brightly lighted room he had been in.

He hurried forward. An iatrobot must just have finished an operation; it was stripping off its gloves and tossing them in an autoclave, and four attendant robots were wheeling out an operating table with a patient strapped to it.

"I want you to examine a patient," Denton told the yatter.

"I cannot examine a patient without a requisition from CA-3," the robot said in its toneless voice.

Denton didn't know what to do. He was wearing sidearms, but he couldn't coerce a robot, and if he damaged this one, it would not only be useless to Miriam, but dangerous. And he knew that CA-3—if there was anybody there at all—wouldn't grant him the requisition.

He'd have to forge it. The elevator he tried didn't work; he ran down the four flights of stairs to the admitting desk.

Here, for the first time, he was fortunate. Nobody was on duty, and he was able to ruffle through stacks of papers and forms until he found one of the yellow CA-3 slips.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

He erased the former name and wrote in Miriam's name and ID number. The sex was right. He thought the date on the slip would serve. His hands were sweating; his heart knocked against his ribs.

He caught up with the iatrobot on the third floor. "The requisition," he said. He held the slip out to it.

The yatter scanned the slip intently. Denton held his breath. It handed the slip back to him. "Very well," it said. "Where is she?"

Denton felt dizzy with relief. "Come along, I'll show you," he replied.

The yatter rolled beside him on its noiseless wheels into Miriam's ward. It picked up the chart at the foot of her bed and examined it. "The prognosis is unfavorable," it said.

"Never mind that," Denton answered. "Examine her and tell me what can be done."

"As you like."

While Denton looked on anxiously, it stripped back the covers and began to examine Miriam. Once or twice it asked her a question. At last it straightened.

"She is suffering from radiation damage," it said. "That is why her wounds do not heal. There is nothing to be done."

For a moment Denton felt paralyzed. Then he said, "There must be something. There must be some possible treatment. There must be something that can be done."

"A possible treatment, yes," said the iatrobot. "She might be helped by massive doeses of sulfhydryl laureate. But that drug is in short supply. It is forbidden to administer more than three milligrams of it to a patient. It is a fighters' drug, reserved for those who can be salvaged easily." It started to roll away.

"Wait," Denton ordered. "Sulfhydryl laureate. Where is this drug kept?"

"Why do you wish to know?"

"So I can get a requisition for it."

"You cannot get a requisition for it.—It is kept in the pharmacy, with our other drugs."

The robot wheeled away. For a moment Denton couldn't think what to do. A forgery wouldn't help. The pharmacy would be closed. He didn't even know the chemical symbol . . . Nonsense. He'd get the drug.

"I'll try to hurry," he told Miriam.

The pharmacy was closed. The door was locked. Denton burned out the lock with his blaster. He stepped into a wilderness of flasks and bottles.

He looked for the drug a long time before he found it. It was on a low shelf under the window, in a dark brown container.

He wanted to be sure. He read the label again: *Sulfhydryl laureate. Capsules. 3 mg.* Yes, it was all right.

He was just opening his pocket

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

to put the bottle in when a voice behind him said, "What are you doing here?"

He jumped to his feet, his gun in his hand. It was the pharmacist: a human being, not a robot, with a careworn, intelligent face. Denton said, "Don't try to stop me."

"Oh, I won't. . . . Sulfhydryl laureate. A specific for radiation damage. But it's restricted, in short supply."

"It's for my girl. Besides, the enemy attacks have stopped. The fighters won't need it any more."

"Um. You must not have been having your therapy, to be able to realize that."

Denton didn't know what the man's attitude to him was. He said, "What about you? You're not tranquilized either."

"No. I can't help people—sometimes a pharmacist can help people a little—if I'm tranquilized." He picked up another bottle from a shelf and held it out to Denton, who was watching him with alert suspicion, his gun ready.

"You'd better take this along too," he said. "Codeine. If she's had much radiation damage, she'll need it. Where is she, in the hospital?"

"Yes." Denton reached out his left hand and took the codeine.

"I won't give you away," the pharmacist said. "But get out of here as soon as you can. Before morning, anyhow. The police force is still operating. If they catch you, they'll not only put you under arrest, they'll take the sulfhydryl away from you."

The pharmacist turned his back on Denton and walked toward the door. "Come with us," Denton called after him, on impulse.

"No. I can still help people here. But you'd better get out." He didn't turn to speak.

"Yes. All right. Thanks."

Denton went back to Miriam's ward. He made her take two of the sulfhydryl capsules and half a codeine pill. "Have you had anything to eat?" he wanted to know.

"Not since morning."

"I'll get us something."

There wasn't much in the hospital kitchen, but he opened a can of eggs and found bread. He took the food back on a tray and they ate side by side, sharing food for the first time in years.

"Miriam . . ." he said when they had finished.

"Yes?" She was holding his hand.

"We've got to get out of here." He told her about the pharmacist.

"But—where could we go?" Her voice had lost the hopeless note it had held earlier, and become edged with anxiety. "And the roads must be guarded. What's it like outside?"

"We can try to get through to a neutral area. We don't know how limited the war has been, or what's been happening. We'll have to find out. About an exit—could you ride in a wheelchair?"

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

"I—I guess so." He knew she dreaded the physical pain of moving. He squeezed her hand.

"If you can ride in a chair," he said, "I think I can get us out through one of the horizontal ventilating ducts."

"But—aren't there fans—"

"I believe the fans have stopped operating." He told her of the dust motes he had noticed on his way to the hospital. "Some of the horizontal ducts are big enough to be walked in. You know, I used to be an engineer. And they go for miles, to outside the city walls, to bring in uncontaminated air.

"I'll go hunt for a wheelchair."

"Darling Dick."

He found a wheelchair in the storeroom where the dismantled robots were. He slung cans of food and a water flask under it, and padded the seat with blankets and covers for Miriam. He added a flashlight, and bandages to dress Miriam's wounds. But by now he was so tired that he had to have rest. He gave Miriam two more capsules, and then pulled up one of the ward beds beside her and lay down on it. He slept, holding her hand.

They left the hospital while it was still dark. They passed a robot nurse on the exit ramp, but it made no attempt to stop them. A ventilator entrance was only a couple of blocks away. Denton began to trundle the chair along the dark and silent street.

After a block and a half, he stopped. "Just a minute," he said. He wormed his way in through the front of a partly boarded-up store.

Before Miriam had time to be alarmed, he was back with something that he laid in her lap.

"Dick! A mandolin!" Her face had lit up. Gently she caressed the smooth wood of the instrument.

"And here's a pick for it." He put it in her hand.

Half a block later, they came to the ventilator opening. It was screened. He burned through the catch with his blaster and pushed the chair inside. He pulled the mesh back in place.

The going was rough—the duct was heavily corrugated—but possible. When he saw how much the jolting hurt Miriam, he gave her a pain pill. They had gone perhaps two miles when he realized that they were almost exactly underneath the spot on the city's top level where his gun crew was stationed.

He hesitated. Miriam's head was drooping. He hated to leave her. But he wanted to try to see what he could do for his gun crew, and when he explained it to her, she nodded.

He gave her two more sulfhydryl capsules and another pain pill. He wormed his way through the ventilator mesh, which was loose on the cross-opening, and walked and rode up the four levels to the top.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

The sun had just cleared the horizon. His crew was coming on duty, laughing and talking and cracking jokes. It was a fine fresh day.

For a moment Denton envied them. They looked so fresh and relaxed, their faces smooth and rested, enameled with calm. Perhaps false calm, false security, was better than nothing. Then he thought of Miriam, waiting below.

He heard Terry, his lieutenant, say to the others, "A wonderful day to be starting a war!" The others laughed. Denton stepped forward and laid his hand on Terry's sleeve.

"Terry," he said, "the war is over. The war is over. There isn't any more."

The other man's eyes widened. Then he began to laugh. "God, sir, you're a joker. Wait until I tell the others! 'There isn't any more!' What a sharp ramp!"

Denton shook his head. "I mean it. The war's over. Everybody on the other side is dead. *The war has been going on for ten years.*"

For a moment Terry looked undecided. Then he laughed again. "What a ramp, sir, what a ramp.—Donovan, you'd better hurry and load those shells. Let's get cracking. It's mighty important to get the advantage in these first few days."

Denton spoke to Donovan, to O'Shea, to Carrignan. They either laughed at him or looked embarrassedly away. It wasn't any use, they wouldn't listen. He hadn't thought it would be. They'd had their therapy.

He gave up at last. As he turned toward the steps that led away from the emplacement, he heard Terry say buoyantly, "A wonderful day to be starting a war!"

The pain pill had helped Miriam. She smiled at him and kissed him. "I tuned the mandolin while you were gone," she said. "Listen:

"'Slack your rope, hangs-a-man,
O slack it for a while;
I think I see my true-love coming,
Riding many a mile. . . .'"

Denton began to push the chair on over the rough surface, and when she got to the last part of the song — the answer to the condemned man's anxious question, *"'Or have you come to see me hanging on the gallows-tree?'"*— he joined in with her.

Together they sang:

"'Yes, I have brought you gold,
Yes, I have paid your fee,
Nor have I come to see you
Hanging on the gallows-tree.'"

The air in the duct seemed fresher. What would it be like when they got outside? Their chances weren't very good, and Denton knew it. A sick woman in a wheelchair, and a mandolin. But he smiled as he pushed the chair ahead on its bumpy road.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

It's a pleasure to revive another of Mr. Van Doren's quiet imaginings—this time a story with an odd sort of gentle terror, telling of two children, a chestnut vendor, and a house that suddenly wasn't.

The Witch of Ramoth

by MARK VAN DOREN

IT WAS COLD AT THE CORNER OF Springfield and Willow. A wind always blew there, but this time it was bitter, and fluttered the small blue fire under the tray of chestnuts an old woman was keeping warm for the children who passed.

But the children of Ramoth had never seen chestnuts being roasted before. It was not a city, it was not even a big town, and old women at street corners were an unusual sight.

"Chestnuts, chestnuts!" this one cried in a cracked voice that the wind blew away up Willow Street as if it were a puff of steam escaping from her instead of from the stove she tended.

And the children who were not afraid of her laughed—the girls because she was so ugly, the boys because they didn't know what it was she roasted. "Buckeyes!" they shouted. "Hot buckeyes! Odd or even—burn your hands to death with red-hot buckeyes!"

She paid no attention to this, but poked at the brown nuts to keep them from getting scorched, or peered from under the brim of her wide hat to see who was coming next down Springfield Street or Willow. She seemed to be expecting someone in particular, someone who would buy. Someone, anyway, who would stop and look respectfully at what she sold.

When Tom and Abigail appeared, swinging the empty lunch boxes their mother had filled that morning, the old woman clapped her dark hands and pulled the torn cloak tighter about her neck. They looked very small in the dark, and indeed they were only children; but nobody else was visible at this moment, and she was as glad to see them as she would be if she had been expecting them. Perhaps she had.

But they were arguing, and didn't even see her there at the cold corner as they turned up Willow Hill. The

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

street climbed for a block, then leveled off for a while in the direction of the high mountains east of Ramoth. Their house was in the second block. Number 27.

They didn't see her because they were glaring at each other as they passed.

"You did too!" said Tom.

"I did not!" said Abigail, who was younger. "I didn't, and you know it. When we get home—"

The old woman, looking after them as they started up the walk, heard this, then heard no more. She reached over, raked the chestnuts into a row, picked out the fourth one, put it in her pocket, and turned her head the other way. The fourth chestnut had been burning hot, but her fingers were used to this, and so were the thick folds of her skirt. She smacked her lips, rubbed her nose thoughtfully, and settled down to wait for further people, young or old, to come along and notice her. Yet no one came.

"What's that burning?" said Abigail at the top of the rise. A whiff of chestnut smoke had followed them, blown all this way by the wind. "Is there a fire?"

"Oh," said Tom, who like his sister had already forgotten being angry, "leaves. Or something. I don't see—"

He stopped suddenly.

"See what?" said Abigail, loosening the muffler at her throat.

"Do *you?*"

He was staring like a ghost.

"What *is* it? What's the matter?"

"Look. Our house."

It wasn't there. The fourth house from the corner, between Williamses and Rortys, wasn't there with its steep roof—the steepest roof in the row, they had always been proud to say, and there was no such roof. No such house. No lighted window on the near side as you came, with Tiger sitting on the sill pretending he hadn't missed anybody; with Father behind him, walking up and down impatient for supper; and with Mother in the kitchen, out of sight, getting it ready.

"Tom."

He didn't hear.

"Tom! There isn't even a place for it. Nothing's happened to it. It didn't burn. It isn't—it simply—"

Abigail's teeth chattered so that she couldn't go on.

"No vacant lot," said Tom as if to himself. "You would think it never *had* been there. Rortys is where it was, and Williamses. They haven't changed. But they're next door to one another. The block—it hasn't changed either — hasn't shortened or anything—except—"

He couldn't say any more, nor could his sister.

They looked desperately at each other, doubting their very selves. Tom felt his feet tingle, and then his scalp; and he thought Abigail did too, for she stamped once or twice, gently, and rubbed the top of her head. But he wouldn't ask.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

Mr. Thorne—Mary's father, down the street—was coming now. Both of them saw him, tall beneath the next lamp, and decided they were glad. If anything had happened, he would know. He would see them; he would say—

But the serious Mr. Thorne, more serious than ever, went by without a word. They had stepped off the walk to let him pass, and he had passed; but not like one who saw them there.

"Mr. Thorne!"

Abigail was running after him. But Tom caught up with her and held her, shaking his head. They would cross over, she understood him to mean, and find out for themselves.

Even then they knew Mr. Thorne hadn't heard.

They crossed Willow Street, scuffling through the dead leaves, and stopped fearfully in front of Williamses' house. Number 25—there it was, so why were they afraid?

They hurried on, looking straight ahead. Number 29 – nothing at Rortys was different either. And yet—

"Tom!" whispered Abigail. "Why was it we didn't make any noise going through those leaves? We didn't. I'm sure."

"Be still."

The Rortys' porch light had come on, and Mrs. Rorty was at the open door, glancing up and down the street.

"Mrs. Rorty!" called Tom, not very loud. But loud enough for her to know he was there. If he was.

She stepped to the edge of the porch, but not to answer anybody. She leaned out, holding on to a post, and studied the darkness right and left. It was time for Mr. Rorty to come home. More than time, perhaps, for she seemed anxious.

Before Tom could prevent it, Abigail dashed forward out of the dark and reached up to give a pull at Mrs. Rorty's apron, a red one with a pattern of large flowers.

She grasped it firmly, or thought she did; and felt nothing. Nothing at all. The goods didn't gather where her thumb and fingers closed.

Abigail screamed, or thought she did, and ran back to where Tom, reaching for her mouth, covered it with both his hands.

"You mustn't," he said. But she could tell. He too was terrified.

They watched Mrs. Rorty go in. As she was about to close the door, however, she opened it again so that Ranger could come out. Old Ranger, rheumatic on the wooden steps—*he* would sniff at them at least, and wag his heavy tail, and wait patiently to be petted.

But not so. Even when they called him he had no curiosity; and Abigail had to step aside for him as he lumbered toward the curb.

The porch light went out, and they could no longer see each other's eyes. They could only hear Ranger among the leaves, starting and stopping, then starting on

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

again, his huge paws making an absurd, solemn sound in the dry remnants of elm.

Abigail put her hand in Tom's.

"What'll we do?" She was crying.

"Walk up and down a while. What else? Maybe it will—maybe we are—"

"What?"

"Come on. We'll walk—well, anywhere. I don't feel tired. Do you?"

"No."

"Or cold?"

"Not a bit."

It was strange, thought Abigail, how warm she felt all over, and how light. How clear their voices sounded to each other, how low and clear, how separate and natural; yet no one else could hear them. How easily they moved together, their hands swinging at their sides, as the moon rose and showed them Ramoth Mountain.

"Shall we go there?" she said.

In no time they were among the giant pines. The white moon, feeling its way down through the shaggy tops, found a fox off to their left—a startled fox, with one foot lifted, that seemed unable to run. But not because of them. It was the sudden light that kept him there, his foot curled at his breast, while they fumbled closer to each other and went on.

Owls whimpered, but not at them, and when they heard something heavy bounding through the underbrush they knew they hadn't started it.

"I'll tell you," said Tom. "Echo Ledge. Listen—it's over there—if *it* doesn't answer—"

He put his hands to his mouth and shouted "Hey!"

No sound came back.

"Twenty-seven!"

Only a twig snapped somewhere.

Abigail knew he was shaking all over. He had counted on the echo; he had been sure of that.

"Let's go home," he said, turning and running.

"Wait!" The woods were so thick, so dark now in spite of the moon.

He waited till she found him, then caught her hand. "Come on. I didn't mean go *home,* but—"

"Oh, let's do!" Maybe it would be there this time.

But it wasn't, and she thought Tom didn't even turn his head to see. The Williamses' shades were up, and Lottie was practicing at the piano. They could see her through the panes. Between here and the Rortys—what? A little space, just big enough for a car. All their house folded away—all of it, with Mother and Father and Tiger, and two small rooms upstairs. Their own rooms. Pitch dark, of course, because—but how could they be either dark or light?

Abigail burst into tears, it was so hard to talk even to herself. She said impossible things.

"Don't cry," said Tom. "We'll go on down to Springfield Street—at least that far—then maybe—"

"What?"

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

He still had hold of her hand when they reached the corner and saw an old woman bent over a smoking tray of brown nuts.

"Who's that?"

Abigail must have been nervous, or afraid. Otherwise she wouldn't have spoken so loud. For the old woman looked up.

"And who are you?" The sickle of her nose, curving down as she grinned, almost cleft her lips in two.

It was Tom who realized it first. "You *heard* my sister? You see *us?*"

"Why not, why not! Are you so hard to look at then? Those"—for Tom was staring into the tray—"are chestnuts. Will you buy?"

But the boy and girl were thinking about the whiff of smoke—this smoke—that they had smelled at the top of the hill. It was when they first had *noticed*. It wouldn't be there now. It hadn't been when they came down.

They were turning, they were running up again.

"Will you buy?"

It was so much like a command that Tom at least looked back. She was poking the chestnuts. She was putting them in a row.

"Wait," he called to Abigail, who was not yet out of sight. "We ought to."

"Don't you *want* to?" That hideous face—why couldn't he look away?

"Yes," he said, "I do. But how much? I haven't any money. I could go and get some."

"Where?"

He pointed over Abigail's head. "Up there. That is, if—"

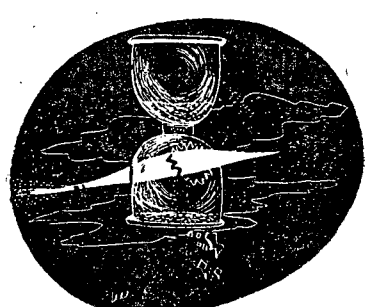
"Then I'll wait."

She made a gap in the row, wide enough for one more chestnut, and thrust an arm down among the wrinkles of her skirt. "But hurry. I haven't much more time."

"I will, if I can find—"

"You can. You will. Supper's ready, and they're worried. The great cat, too. You're fifteen seconds late. But hurry back. All of these—you can have them for a dime. The little girl—will she wait here with me? She won't? A wild thing!"

For Abigail had long been out of hearing. She knew, and Tom knew, what would be up there.



LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

Recommended Reading

by ANTHONY BOUCHER

WHEN SPUTNIK I WAS LAUNCHED five months ago, a number of writers must have been at work on stories which were immediately outdated. I've been wondering what would become of such works-in-progress abruptly contradicted by history, and Charles Eric Maine's SPACEWAYS SATELLITE (Avalon, $2.75) provides the surprising answer: They get published.

I don't know why there should be such a rash of imports (4 novels in 10 months) by such a third-rater as this English author, who is never more than passable and who falls, in this book, far short of even that description. This one's about "the first satellite rocket to be launched from this planet," which is a one-stage vehicle being built by a small civilian project in a state called South Nevada, in a desert rich in lakes and rivers.

Once you have swallowed all the scientific, political and geographical absurdities, you are still faced with the plot, which deals with the question of whether the project's top scientist did or did not stuff the bodies of his wife and her lover into the satellite before take-off—a sort of detective story in which the detective does nothing and the solution, such as it is, comes about by chance.

A second satellite is to be piloted, and, through as felicitous a typographical error as I've ever seen, one of its specifications is an "automatic rocket-ejector seat for the ...plot." It should've been used much earlier — somewhere around page 1.

It is, in contrast, astonishing how little G. Harry Stine's ROCKET POWER AND SPACE FLIGHT (Holt, $3.75) has been outmoded by events. It was published just a week before the launching of Sputnik; I received my review copy late and thought, "Poor Harry! Such lousy luck: out of date already..." But my eyes opened when Stine skipped lightly over the whole subject of Vanguard because "in the interval between the writing of this and your reading it, so many things may have happened that it would be anticlimatic to talk much about Vanguard here." To be sure, the book contains nothing about Russian rocketry; nothing was available save in countless Russian publications which were not thought worth translating. But Stine's closing admonition is: "We should never for-

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

get that 'Science knows no country.' What we are capable of doing, someone else can also do."

The whole book is as level-headed as those quotations indicate. It covers much of the same prophetic material as Stine's earlier EARTH SATELLITES, but incomparably better written and organized, with great clarity and a Heinleinesque ability to convey what rocketing and rocketeers are like. Intended primarily as a career guide for "the rocket engineers of tomorrow," it is also one of the most illuminating books for the general reader in this new age.

Eric Frank Russell's WASP (Avalon, $2.75) has the ingenious premise that "by scrawling suitable words upon a wall, the right man in the right place at the right time might immobilize an armored division." So secret agent James Mowry is planted on the ninety-fourth planet of the Sirian Empire to become a one-man Underground to soften up the planet for a Terran invasion. It's a clever and diverting thriller, to which one's only objection might be that it's hardly s.f. in any sense: it would take little more than a few changes in place names to make it the story of an American agent in Russia. (Aside to E.F.R.: And why not? It might even sell to Hollywood—and could make a honey of a picture.)

YEAR 2018! (Avon, 35¢) is the meaningless American retitling of James Blish's THEY SHALL HAVE STARS (London, 1956), a "prequel" to EARTHMAN, COME HOME. This tells of the origin of the principles of immortality and anti-gravity upon which the "Okie" civilization of EARTHMAN is based, but—surprisingly for Blish—presents its ideas unconvincingly and diffusely, with extremely little story.

THEY'D RATHER BE RIGHT, by Mark Clifton and Frank Riley (Gnome, $3), is another "novel" which is all talk, and even more unconvincing, since it depends entirely on the notion of the absolute infallibility of a cybernetic machine. I may have been particularly ill-disposed toward this concept because, on the very day I was reading this book, I received a notice from the Internal Revenue Service in which its mechanical brain made an error of $20,000 in the amount of tax payable; but even without such a traumatic experience one might well protest the credulous machinolatry of Messrs. Clifton and Riley—almost as much as their inability to keep a story moving.

A. E. van Vogt's long-awaited THE MIND CAGE (Simon & Schuster, $3.50 yet) is disappointing—a mere rehash of assorted plot-elements that van Vogt has handled much better in the past. There's a real whopper of an Infallible Brain, a tyrannous super-dictator, a mutant sub-race, palace intrigue and war-

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

fare for power with identities switching back and forth and everybody turning out to be somebody else... It's all familiar and somewhat foolish; but at least van Vogt retains his ability to keep things moving and to make the most preposterous events momentarily exciting.

Roger Manvell's THE DREAMERS (Simon & Schuster, $2.95) brings in some ESPatter in an attempt to modernize the good old African Curse, with dullish results. It starts off admirably with the strange and horrible notion of a contagious nightmare; but once Amenu King, witch doctor and M. D., enters, it stands revealed as just a routine "psychic" short story at book length. Carnacki the Ghost Finder did this sort of thing far more effectively than Dr. King.

Accidents prevented a proper timely review here of last summer's EARTHMAN'S BURDEN by Poul Anderson and Gordon R. Dickson (Gnome, $3); but it should be noted that this first collection of the adventures of Alex Jones and the Hokas contains 2 stories from F&SF, 3 from other magazines, and 1 brand-new episode, plus a good deal of fresh connective material. I gather that readers can take the Hokas (with avidity) or leave them alone (with a shudder). If, like me, you belong firmly in the first class, you aren't apt to find a more gleeful book of s.f. (which in this case stands for satiric frolic).

Lester del Rey's ROBOTS AND CHANGELINGS (Ballantine, 35¢) is the new year's first book of shorts, and certain to wind up as one of 1958's best. These 11 stories, mostly new to book form, are del Rey at his best—sensitive, subtle, poignant. Like Kuttner or Leinster, del Rey has been so frighteningly prolific that it's possible to forget how much work of the very first order he has created. Don't miss this well-chosen reminder!

Richard Wilson's THOSE IDIOTS FROM EARTH (Ballantine, 35¢) contains a novelet and 9 shorts, all intensely readable, and nicely varied from farce to horror to an emotional sensitivity worthy of del Rey. Some stories are weakened by having been told before, but even they have rarely been told so well.

Leo Margulies' THREE TIMES INFINITY (Gold Medal, 35¢) offers never-reprinted novellas by Robert A. Heinlein, Theodore Sturgeon and the team of Ray Bradbury and Leigh Brackett. Before you break a leg dashing out to grab it, you should be warned that no author is perfect, and that previous anthologists have been less concerned with Name Value than Mr. Margulies and more preoccupied with story quality.

Extant if unreviewed anthology: THE BEST FROM F&SF: SEVENTH SERIES, edited by Anthony Boucher (Doubleday, $3.75).

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

Vienna-born, Harvard-educated Arthur Oesterreicher resolved at the age of ten that he was going to write s.f. Only now, in his mid-twenties, has he finally got around to it, having been otherwise preoccupied with various editorial jobs, with fiction for the better men's magazines, and with book reviews for the literary weeklies. His first venture into imaginative fiction is this neat, understated and chilling story of an unavoidable failure in communication.

Broken Circuit

by ARTHUR OESTERREICHER

THE WOMAN'S TELEPHONE VOICE WAS warm, inviting, friendly. "Welcome to the Greenfield Exchange. If you have any questions regarding your service, be sure to call the Business Office, Mondays through Fridays, between nine and five. Thank you."

There was a sharp click. John Gorham replaced the receiver and said to the installation man, "Sounds all right." Then he turned to his wife and asked, "Isn't it about time for dinner?"

The telephone man bowed faintly, a curious gesture which for a moment caught Gorham's eye: he stared at the carefully pressed overalls, the starched blue shirt, the peculiar little badge he wore on his cap. Gorham had never seen such a badge before; but then he was new in Florida, having just arrived the previous month after retiring from his contracting business up North.

"Oh dear!" Mrs. Gorham cried. "The chicken's in the oven. I've got to run and look. Soup'll be on in a minute, John, so get ready."

"Goodby, Mr. Gorham," the telephone man said.

"So long now." He watched the man walk with soft slow steps to the door. His tool box seemed unusually large, Gorham thought; they didn't carry them that large up North. As the telephone man turned the doorknob he said, "I am sure you will enjoy your service."

"I'm sure we will," said Gorham.

"Dinner's ready!" announced Mrs. Gorham from the kitchen.

"Goodby," Gorham said. But the telephone man was already gone.

The first call came shortly after dinner.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

"Hello?" It was an everyday kind of man's voice, but like no one Mrs. Gorham knew.

"Who is this?"

"Hello? Hello? Why aren't you answering? Hello? Answer, will you please?" the voice said.

"Are you sure you have the right number? This is Greenfield—"

The voice grew insistent, shrill. "Why aren't you answering? Please answer!"

"You must have the wrong number, mister," Mrs. Gorham said firmly.

She hung up the receiver, returned to her easy chair and picked up her knitting. John Gorham did not look up from his newspaper.

The second call came shortly after midnight. The Gorhams were watching *The Late Show* and beginning to yawn. When the phone rang Gorham wondered who it could be. "Almost bedtime," he said to his wife.

A woman's voice said sharply, "This is the Supervisor speaking. One of the clients has reported your failure to comply with the regulations of the Exchange. I must request an explanation."

"I'm afraid I don't—"

"Will you please answer, Mr. Gorham?"

"This is a new phone, operator. Just installed today. Probably something wrong with the—"

"Mr. Gorham!"

"I'll call the service people—"

"Will you please answer, Mr. Gorham?"

"Probably just a bad line—"

"Mr. Gorham, I hope you know what you're doing!" the woman shrieked. Then there was nothing but a faint, distant hum on the wire.

As he got into bed, John Gorham told his wife, "Remind me in the morning to get the man up here again. Blasted phone's out of order."

Mrs. Gorham was preparing breakfast when the third call came.

"You answer it, dear," she told her husband. "I've got to turn over the eggs."

Gorham yawned, wrapped his bathrobe around him and went to the phone. He could see that the weather outside was off to a gray, drizzly start, unusual weather for Florida.

"I hope you've changed your mind, Mr. Gorham." This time it was a child's voice, high-pitched yet soft. Gorham could not determine whether it belonged to a boy or a girl. It lisped as it said *Mister*.

"Who's this speaking, please? Phone doesn't work too—"

"Apparently you are still recalcitrant, Mr. Gorham. Probably you do not understand the full effects of your actions — or, more properly, inactions. You have disturbed the well-being of a considerable number of people who utilize this exchange. We cannot contact

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

one another so long as you choose to keep the circuit broken. We are cut off from our most profound source of nourishment, from our deepest means of communication." Except for the lisped *s*'s the child's pronunciation was perfect and unhesitating. "There are hundreds of us on this exchange, Mr. Gorham, and we would like you to be one of us. But I plead with you: please reconsider! Or at least explain your motives, let us know the background to this unparalleled situation! Why have you cut yourself off from us? Please answer, I beg of you, Mr. Gorham—I beg of you!" Gorham wondered whether the child was going to burst into tears. What did they all want? The phone was out of order, that's all. . . .

"I can't help you, kid," Mr. Gorham began. "I don't know what you want but I can't help you. Sounds like a lot of tomfoolery anyway, calling folks this early in the morning to—"

"Please, Mr. Gorham," the child's voice said.

"—say fresh things like that? Didn't your daddy and mommy ever—"

"Oh God!" the child screamed. "Now I understand! You can't! You can't talk to us! *You don't know how!"*

"Well of all the—"

"Oh, this is terrible! You've broken the circuit and now it's too late!"

With a snort of anger Gorham slammed the receiver into its cradle.

"Breakfast is ready, dear," Mrs. Gorham called placidly.

"I'll call the company after breakfast," Gorham grunted as he began drinking his coffee.

But it *was* too late. The final phone call came as the Gorhams were buttering their toast.

Mr. Gorham's face turned slightly red as he walked to the telephone. He hesitated a moment before picking up the receiver. It was as if a voice were telling him something, warning him . . . He picked it up and held it to his ear.

A voice he had never heard before said quickly, "Are you ready? One! Two! Three! *All together!"*

Mr. and Mrs. Gorham tottered to the floor amidst a crash of glass which, the newspapers later reported, was heard as far away as the center of Miami. It was estimated that several hundred windows were smashed to bits within a half-mile radius of the Gorhams' house. But most terrible of all was the noise of the voice, the scream which seemed to come simultaneously from the lungs—and the souls—of several hundred men, women, and children. . . .

The Gorhams' death was attributed to heart failure and the blast to an experimental supersonic jet—an attribution confirmed by the customary denials, from Army,

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

Navy and Air Force, that any such plane was aloft.

The repairman with the peculiar badge and the oversized toolbox came to the Gorhams' house the next day and dismantled the telephone. He stuffed the receiver into the box and left, heading toward the center of the city. At the first traffic light he pulled a list from his trouser pocket, crossed off the Gorhams' name, and made a note: *Received signals but unable to reply.* He shrugged. It wasn't anyone's fault, really. Mistakes did happen.

When he got home that night he picked up his telephone. Immediately, as always, they all felt his need and reacted to it together, as one. *It is sad but we are not to blame,* they all transmitted. *Do not be afraid the next time you try someone new. There are more of us and we must find them. . . .*

Thank you. Goodnight, the telephone man thought.

Goodnight, they all thought.

The next morning he called at the house of Mr. and Mrs. William Ross, in another part of the city. Everything went smoothly. They knew who he was as soon as he entered the door.

BINDERS . . .

The Magazine of **FANTASY and SCIENCE FICTION** has in stock a supply of strong, handsome binders for your copies of F&SF. Each binder holds one complete volume — that is, six issues of the magazine. It is easy to use, handy, convenient and economical. The price is $1.50 postpaid. Send your order and remittance to: Special Binder Dept., The Magazine of Fantasy and Science Fiction, 527 Madison Ave., New York 22, N. Y.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

Although by profession a writer and editor, Fritz Leiber has many connections with show business. Back in the days when he signed his stories "Fritz Leiber, Jr.," his father was a noted Shakespearean actor (whose reading of Lear's curse upon his daughters is one of the most exciting memories in my four decades of theater-going) and later a distinguished interpreter of character roles in films. Young Leiber played minor parts in his father's company, and only a few years ago starred in a Chicago production of OTHELLO. *And if (like me) you stay up late to watch old horror movies, you may come across something called* WEIRD WOMAN *that derives remotely from Leiber's magnificent* CONJURE WIFE. *Now Leiber examines one of the strangest phenomena of the entertainment business: the sex goddess—in a terrifyingly vivid story of a psychologist with a craving for power, a weakness for occultism, and a unique office fixture:*

A Deskful of Girls

by FRITZ LEIBER

YES, I SAID GHOSTGIRLS, SEXY ONES. Personally I never in my life saw any ghosts except the sexy kind, though I saw enough of those I'll tell you, but only for one evening, in the dark of course, with the assistance of an eminent (I should also say notorious) psychologist. It was an interesting experience, to put it mildly, and it introduced me to an unknown field of psychophysiology, but under no circumstances would I want to repeat it.

But ghosts are supposed to be frightening? Well, who ever said that sex isn't? It is to the neophyte, female or male, and don't let any of the latter try to kid you. For one thing, sex opens up the unconscious mind, which isn't exactly a picnic area. Sex is a force and rite that is basic, primal; and the caveman or cavewoman in each of us is a truth bigger than the jokes and cartoons about it. Sex was behind the witchcraft religion, the sabbats were sexual orgies. The witch was a sexual creature. So is the ghost.

After all, what is a ghost, according to all traditional views, but the

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

shell of a human being—an animated skin? And the skin is all sex—it's touch, the boundary, the mask of flesh.

I got that notion about skin from my eminent-notorious psychologist, Dr. Emil Slyker, the first and the last evening I met him, at the Countersign Club, though he wasn't talking about ghosts to begin with. He was pretty drunk and drawing signs in the puddle spilled from his triple martini.

He grinned at me and said, "Look here, What's-Your-Name—oh yes, Carr Mackay, Mister *Justine* himself. Well, look here, Carr, I got a deskful of girls at my office in this building and they're needing attention. Let's shoot up and have a look."

Right away my hopelessly naive imagination flashed me a vivid picture of a desk swarming inside with girls about five or six inches high. They weren't dressed — my imagination never dresses girls except for special effects after long thought—but these looked as if they had been modeled from the drawings of Heinrich Kley or Mahlon Blaine. Literal vest-pocket Venuses, saucy and active. Right now they were attempting a mass escape from the desk, using a couple of nail files for saws, and they'd already cut some trap doors between the drawers so they could circulate around. One group was improvising a blowtorch from an atomizer and lighter fluid. Another was trying to turn a key from the inside, using tweezers for a wrench. And they were tearing down and defacing small signs, big to them, which read YOU BELONG TO DR. EMIL SLYKER.

My mind, which looks down at my imagination and refuses to associate with it, was studying Dr. Slyker and also making sure that I behaved outwardly like a worshipful fan, a would-be Devil's apprentice. This approach, helped by the alcohol, seemed to be relaxing him into the frame of mind I wanted him to have—one of boastful condescension. Slyker was a plump gut of a man with a perpetually sucking mouth, in his early fifties, fair-complexioned, blond, balding, with the power-lines around his eyes and at the corners of the nostrils. Over it all he wore the ready-for-photographers mask that is a sure sign its wearer is on the Big Time. Eyes weak, as shown by the dark glasses, but forever peering for someone to strip or cow. His hearing bad too, for that matter, as he didn't catch the barman approaching and started a little when he saw the white rag reaching out toward the spill from his drink. Emil Slyker, "doctor" courtesy of some European universities and a crust like blued steel, movie columnist, pumper of the last ounce of prestige out of that ashcan word "psychologist," psychic researcher several mysterious rumored jumps ahead of Wilhelm Reich with his

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

orgone and Rhine with his ESP, psychological consultant to starlets blazing into stars and other ladies in the bucks, and a particularly expert disher-out of that goulash of psychoanalysis, mysticism and magic that is the *chef-d'oeuvre* of our era. *And,* I was assuming, a particularly successful blackmailer. A stinker to be taken very seriously.

My real purpose in contacting Slyker, of which I hoped he hadn't got an inkling yet, was to offer him enough money to sink a small luxury liner in exchange for a sheaf of documents he was using to blackmail Evelyn Cordew, current pick-of-the-pantheon among our sex goddesses. I was working for another film star, Jeff Crain, Evelyn's ex-husband, but not "ex" when it came to the protective urge. Jeff said that Slyker refused to bite on the direct approach, that he was so paranoid in his suspiciousness as to be psychotic, and that I would have to make friends with him first. Friends with a paranoid!

So in pursuit of this doubtful and dangerous distinction, there I was at the Countersign Club, nodding respectfully happy acquiescence to the Master's suggestion and asking tentatively, "Girls needing attention?"

He gave me his whoremaster, keeper-of-the-keys grin and said, "Sure, women need attention whatever form they're in. They're like pearls in a vault, they grow dull and fade unless they have regular contact with warm human flesh. Drink up."

He gulped half of what was left of his martini—the puddle had been blotted up meantime and the black surface reburnished—and we made off without any fuss over checks or tabs; I had expected him to stick me with the former at least, but evidently I wasn't enough of an acolyte yet to be granted that honor.

It fitted that I had caught up with Emil Slyker at the Countersign Club. It is to a key club what the latter is to a top-crust bar. Strictly Big Time, set up to provide those in it with luxury, privacy and security. Especially security: I had heard that the Countersign Club bodyguarded even their sober patrons home late of an evening with or without their pick-ups, but I hadn't believed it until this well-dressed and doubtless well-heeled silent husky rode the elevator up the dead midnight office building with us and only turned back at Dr. Slyker's door. Of course I couldn't have got into the Countersign Club on my own—Jeff had provided me with my entree: an illustrated edition of the Marquis de Sade's *Justine,* its margins annotated by a world-famous recently-deceased psychoanalyst. I had sent it in to Slyker with a note full of flowery expression of "my admiration for your work in the psycho-physiology of sex."

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

The door to Slyker's office was something. No glass, just a dark expanse — teak or ironwood, I guessed—with EMIL SLYKER, CONSULTING PSYCHOLOGIST burnt into it. No Yale lock, but a large keyhole with a curious silver valve that the key pressed aside. Slyker showed me the key with a deprecating smile; the gleaming castellations of its web were the most complicated I'd ever seen, its stem depicted Pasiphaë and the bull. He certainly was willing to pay for atmosphere.

There were three sounds: first the soft grating of the turning key, then the solid snap of the bolts retracting, then a faint creak from the hinges.

Open, the door showed itself four inches thick, more like that of a safe or vault, with a whole cluster of bolts that the key controlled. Just before it closed, something very odd happened: a filmy plastic sheet whipped across the bolts from the outer edge of the doorway and conformed itself to them so perfectly that I suspected static electrical attraction of some sort. Once in place it barely clouded the silvery surface of the bolts and would have taken a close look to spot. It didn't interfere in any way with the door closing or the bolts snapping back into their channels.

The Doctor sensed or took for granted my interest in the door and explained over his shoulder in the dark, "My Siegfried Line. More than one ambitious crook or inspired murderer has tried to smash or think his or her way through that door. They've had no luck. They can't. At this moment there is literally no one in the world who could come through that door without using explosives — and they'd have to be well placed. Cozy."

I privately disagreed with the last remark. Not to make a thing of it, I would have preferred to feel in a bit closer touch with the silent corridors outside, even though they held nothing but the ghosts of unhappy stenographers and neurotic dames my imagination had raised on the way up.

"Is the plastic film part of an alarm system?" I asked. The Doctor didn't answer. His back was to me. I remembered that he'd shown himself a shade deaf. But I didn't get a chance to repeat my question for just then some indirect lighting came on, although Slyker wasn't near any switch ("Our talk triggers it," he said) and the office absorbed me.

Naturally the desk was the first thing I looked for, though I felt foolish doing it. It was a big deep job with a dark soft gleam that might have been that of fine-grained wood or metal. The drawers were file size, not the shallow ones my imagination had played with, and there were three tiers of them to the right of the kneehole—space enough for a couple of life-size girls if they were

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

doubled up according to one of the formulas for the hidden operator of Maelzel's chess-playing automaton. My imagination, which never learns, listened hard for the patter of tiny bare feet and the clatter of little tools. There wasn't even the scurry of mice, which would have done something to my nerves, I'm sure.

The office was an L with the door at the end of this leg. The walls I could see were mostly lined with books, though a few line drawings had been hung—my imagination had been right about Heinrich Kley, though I didn't recognize these pen-and-ink originals, and there were some Fuselis you won't ever see reproduced in books handled over the counter.

The desk was in the corner of the L with the components of a hi fi spaced along the bookshelves this side of it. All I could see yet of the other leg of the L was a big surrealist armchair facing the desk but separated from it by a wide low bare table. I took a dislike to that armchair on first sight, though it looked extremely comfortable. Slyker had reached the desk now and had one hand on it as he turned back toward me, and I got the impression that the armchair had changed shape since I had entered the office—that it had been more like a couch to start with, although now the back was almost straight.

But the Doctor's left thumb indicated I was to sit in it and I couldn't see another chair in the place except the padded button on which he was now settling himself—one of those stenographer deals with a boxing-glove back placed to catch you low in the spine like the hand of a knowledgeable masseur. In the other leg of the L, besides the armchair, were more books, a heavy concertina blind sealing off the window, two narrow doors that I supposed were those of a closet and a lavatory, and what looked like a slightly scaled-down and windowless telephone booth until I guessed it must be an orgone box of the sort Reich had invented to restore the libido when the patient occupies it. I quickly settled myself in the chair, not to be gingerly about it. It was rather incredibly comfortable, almost as if it had adjusted its dimensions a bit at the last instant to conform to mine. The back was narrow at the base but widened and then curled in and over to almost a canopy around my head and shoulders. The seat too widened a lot toward the front, where the stubby legs were far apart. The bulky arms sprang unsupported from the back and took my own just right, though curving inwards with the barest suggestion of a hug. The leather or unfamiliar plastic was as firm and cool as young flesh and its texture as mat under my fingertips.

"An historic chair," the Doctor observed, "designed and built for

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

me by von Helmholtz of the Bauhaus. It has been occupied by all my best mediums during their so-called trance states. It was in that chair that I established to my entire satisfaction the real existence of ectoplasm—that elaboration of the mucous membrane and occasionally the entire epidermis that is distantly analogous to the birth envelope and is the fact behind the persistent legends of the snake-shedding of filmy live skins by human beings, and which the spiritualist quacks are forever trying to fake with their fluorescent cheesecloth and doctored negatives. Orgone, the primal sexual energy? —Reich makes a persuasive case, still... But ectoplasm?—yes! Angna went into trance sitting just where you are, her entire body dusted with a special powder, the tracks and distant smudges of which later revealed the ectoplasm's movements and origin—chiefly in the genital area. The test was conclusive and led to further researches, very interesting and quite revolutionary, none of which I have published; my professional colleagues froth at the mouth, elaborating an opposite sort of foam, whenever I mix the psychic with psychoanalysis—they seem to forget that hypnotism gave Freud his start and that for a time the man was keen on cocaine. Yes indeed, an historic chair."

I naturally looked down at it and for a moment I thought I had vanished, because I couldn't see my legs. Then I realized that the upholstery had changed to a dark gray exactly matching my suit except for the ends of the arms, which merged by fine gradations into a sallow hue which blotted out my hands.

"I should have warned you that it's now upholstered in chameleon plastic," Slyker said with a grin. "It changes color to suit the sitter. The fabric was supplied me over a year ago by Henri Artois, the French dilettante chemist. So the chair has been many shades: dead black when Mrs. Fairlee—you recall the case?—came to tell me she had just put on mourning and then shot her bandleader husband, a charming Florida tan during the later experiments with Angna. It helps my patients forget themselves when they're free-associating and it amuses some people."

I wasn't one of them, but I managed a smile I hoped wasn't too sour. I told myself to stick to business — Evelyn Cordew's and Jeff Crain's business. I must forget the chair and other incidentals, and concentrate on Dr. Emil Slyker and what he was saying—for I have by no means given all of his remarks, only the more important asides. He had turned out to be the sort of conversationalist who will talk for two hours solid, then when you have barely started your reply, give you a hurt look and say, "Excuse me, but if I can get a word in

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

edgewise—" and talk for two hours more. The liquor may have been helping, but I doubt it. When we had left the Countersign Club he had started to tell me the stories of three of his female clients—a surgeon's wife, an aging star scared by a comeback opportunity, and a college girl in trouble—and the presence of the bodyguard hadn't made him hold back on gory details.

Now, sitting at his desk and playing with the catch of a file drawer as if wondering whether to open it, he had got to the point where the surgeon's wife had arrived at the operating theater early one morning to publish her infidelities, the star had stabbed her press agent with the wardrobe mistress' scissors, and the college girl had fallen in love with her abortionist. He had the conversation-hogger's trick of keeping a half dozen topics in the air at once and weaving back and forth between them without finishing any.

And of course he was a male tantalizer. Now he whipped open the file drawer and scooped out some folders and then held them against his belly and watched me as if to ask himself, "Should I?"

After a maximum pause to build suspense he decided he should, and so I began to hear the story of Dr. Emil Slyker's girls, not the first three, of course—they had to stay frozen at their climaxes unless their folders turned up—but others.

I wouldn't be telling the truth if I didn't admit it was a let-down. Here I was expecting I don't know what from his desk and all I got was the usual glimpses into childhood's garden of father-fixation and sibling rivalry and the bed-changing *Sturm und Drang* of later adolescence. The folders seemed to hold nothing but conventional medico-psychiatric case histories, along with physical measurements and other details of appearance, unusually penetrating *précis* of each client's financial resources, occasional notes on possible psychic gifts and other extrasensory talents, and maybe some candid snapshots, judging from the way he'd sometimes pause to study appreciatively and then raise his eyebrows at me with a smile.

Yet after a while I couldn't help starting to be impressed, if only by the sheer numbers. Here was this stream, this freshet, this flood of females, young and not-so-young but all thinking of themselves as girls and wearing the girl's suede mask even if they didn't still have the girl's natural face, all converging on Dr. Slyker's office with money stolen from their parents or highjacked from their married lovers, or paid when they signed the six-year contract with semiannual options, or held out on their syndicate boyfriends, or received in a lump sum in lieu of alimony, or banked for dreary years every fortnight from paychecks and then

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

withdrawn in one grand gesture, or thrown at them by their husbands that morning like so much confetti, or, so help me, advanced them on their half-written novels. Yes, there was something very impressive about this pink stream of womankind rippling with the silver and green of cash conveyed infallibly, as if all the corridors and streets outside were concrete-walled spillways, to Dr. Slyker's office, but not to work any dynamos there except financial ones, instead to be worked over by a one-man dynamo and go foaming madly or trickling depletedly away or else stagnate excitingly for months, their souls like black swamp water gleaming with mysterious lights.

Slyker stopped short with a harsh little laugh. "We ought to have music with this, don't you think?" he said. "I believe I've got the *Nutcracker Suite* on the spindle," and he touched one of an unobtrusive bank of buttons on his desk.

They came without the whisper of a turntable or the faintest preliminary susurrus of tape, those first evocative, rich, sensual, yet eery chords, but they weren't the opening of any section of the *Nutcracker* I knew—and yet, damn it, they sounded as if they should be. And then they were cut off as if the tape had been snipped and I looked at Slyker and he was white and one of his hands was just coming back from the bank of buttons and the other was clutching the file folders as if they might somehow get away from him and both hands were shaking and I felt a shiver crawling down my own neck.

"Excuse me, Carr," he said slowly, breathing heavily, "but that's high-voltage music, psychically very dangerous, that I use only for special purposes. It *is* part of the *Nutcracker,* incidently—the 'Ghostgirls Pavan' which Chaikovsky suppressed completely under orders from Madam Sesostris, the Saint Petersburg clairvoyant. It was tape-recorded for me by... no, I don't know you quite well enough to tell you that. However, we will shift from tape to disk and listen to the known sections of the suite, played by the same artists."

I don't know how much this recording or the circumstances added to it, but I have never heard the "Danse Arabe" or the "Waltz of the Flowers" or the "Dance of the Flutes" so voluptuous and exquisitely menacing—those tinkling, superficially sugar-frosted bits of music that class after class of little-girl ballerinas have minced and teetered to *ad nauseam,* but underneath the glittering somber fancies of a thorough-going eroticist. As Slyker, guessing my thoughts, expressed it: "Chaikovsky shows off each instrument—the flute, the throatier woodwinds, the silver chimes, the harp bubbling gold—

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

as if he were dressing beautiful women in jewels and feathers and furs solely to arouse desire and envy in other men."

For of course we only listened to the music as background for Dr. Slyker's zigzagging, fragmentary, cream-skimming reminiscences. The stream of girls flowed on in their smart suits and flowered dresses and bouffant blouses and toreador pants, their improbable loves and unsuspected hates and incredible ambitions, the men who gave them money, the men who gave them love, the men who took both, the paralyzing trivial fears behind their wisely chic or corn-fed fresh façades, their ravishing and infuriating mannerisms, the trick of eye or lip or hair or wrist-curve or bosom-angle that was the focus of sex in each.

For Slyker could bring his girls to life very vividly, I had to grant that, as if he had more to jog his memory than case histories and notes and even photographs, as if he had the essence of each girl stoppered up in a little bottle, like perfumes, and was opening them one by one to give me a whiff. Gradually I became certain that there *were* more than papers and pictures in the folders, though this revelation, like the earlier one about the desk, at first involved a let-down. Why should I get excited if Dr. Slyker filed away mementos of his clients?—even if they were keepsakes of love: lace handkerchiefs and filmy scarves, faded flowers, ribbons and bows, 20-dernier stockings, long locks of hair, gay little pins and combs, swatches of material that might have been torn from dresses, snippets of silk delicate as ghost dandelions—what difference did it make to me if he treasured this junk or it fed his sense of power or was part of his blackmail? Yet it did make a difference to me, for like the music, like the little fearful starts he'd kept giving ever since the business of the "Ghost-girls Pavan," it helped to make everything very real, as if in some more-than-ordinary sense he did have a deskful of girls. For now as he opened or closed the folders there'd often be a puff of powder, a pale little cloud as from a jogged compact, and the pieces of silk gave the impression of being larger than they could be, like a magician's colored handkerchiefs, only most of them were flesh-colored, and I began to get glimpses of what looked like X-ray photographs and artist's transparencies, maybe lifesize but cunningly folded, and other slack pale things that made me think of the ultra-fine rubber masks some aging actresses are rumored to wear, and all sorts of strange little flashes and glimmers of I don't know what, except there was that aura of femininity and I found myself remembering what he'd said about fluorescent cheesecloth and I did seem to get whiffs of very

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

individual perfume with each new folder.

He had two file drawers open now, and I could just make out the word burnt into their fronts. The word certainly looked like PRESENT, and there were two of the closed file drawers labeled what looked like PAST and FUTURE. I didn't know what sort of hocus-pocus was supposed to be furthered by those words, but along with Slyker's darting, lingering monologue they did give me the feeling that I was afloat in a river of girls from all times and places, and the illusion that there somehow was a girl in each folder became so strong that I almost wanted to say, "Come on, Emil, trot 'em out, let me look at 'em."

He must have known exactly what feelings he was building up in me, for now he stopped in the middle of a saga of a starlet married to a Negro baseball player and looked at me with his eyes open a bit too wide and said, "All right, Carr, let's quit fooling around. Down at the Countersign I told you I had a deskful of girls and I wasn't kidding—although the truth behind that assertion would get me certified by all the little head-shrinkers and Viennese windbags except it would scare the pants off them first. I mentioned ectoplasm earlier, and the proof of its reality. It's exuded by most properly stimulated women in deep trance, but it's not just some dimly fluorescent froth swirling around in a dark séance chamber. It takes the form of an envelope or limp balloon, closed toward the top but open toward the bottom, weighing less than a silk stocking but duplicating the person exactly down to features and hair, following the master-plan of the body's surface buried in the genetic material of the cells. It is a real shed skin but also dimly alive, a gossamer mannequin. A breath can crumple it, a breeze can whisk it away, but under some circumstances it becomes startlingly stable and resilient, a real apparition. It's invisible and almost impalpable by day, but by night, when your eyes are properly accomodated, you can just manage to see it. Despite its fragility it's almost indestructible, except by fire, and potentially immortal. Whether generated in sleep or under hypnosis, in spontaneous or induced trance, it remains connected to the source by a thin strand I call the 'umbilicus' and it returns to the source and is absorbed back into the individual again as the trance fades. But sometimes it becomes detached and then it lingers around as a shell, still dimly alive and occasionally glimpsed, forming the very real basis for the stories of hauntings we have from all centuries and cultures—in fact, I call such shells 'ghosts.' A strong emotional shock generally accounts for a ghost becoming detached from its owner, but it can also be

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

detached artificially. Such a ghost is remarkably docile to one who understands how to handle and cherish it—for instance, it can be folded into an incredibly small compass and tucked away in an envelope, though by daylight you wouldn't notice anything in such an envelope if you looked inside. 'Detached artificially' I said, and that's what I do here in this office, and you know what I use to do it with, Carr?" He snatched up something long and daggerlike and gleaming and held it tight in his plump hand so that it pointed at the ceiling. "Silver shears, Carr, silver for the same reason you use a silver bullet to kill a werewolf, though those words would set the little headshrinkers howling. But would they be howling from outraged scientific attitude, Carr, or from professional jealousy or simply from fear? Just the same as it's unclear why they'd be howling, only certain they would be howling, if I told them that in every fourth or fifth folder in these files I have one or more ghostgirls."

He didn't need to mention fear—I was scared enough myself now, what with him spouting this ghostguff, this spiritualism blather put far more precisely than any spiritualist would dare, this obviously firmly held and elaborately rationalized delusion, this perfect symbolization of a truly insane desire for power over women—filing them away in envelopes!—and then when he got bug-eyed and brandished those foot-long stiletto-shears... Jeff Crain had warned me Slyker was "nuts—brilliant, but completely nuts and definitely dangerous," and I hadn't believed it, hadn't really visualized myself frozen on the medium's throne, locked in ("no one without explosives") with the madman himself. It cost me a lot of effort to keep on the acolyte's mask and simper adoringly at the Master.

My attitude still seemed to be fooling him, though he was studying me in a funny way, for he went on, "All right, Carr, I'll show you the girls, or at least one, though we'll have to put out all the lights after a bit—that's why I keep the window shuttered so tightly—and wait for our eyes to accomodate. But which one should it be?—we have a large field of choice. I think since it's your first and probably your last, it should be someone out of the ordinary, don't you think, someone who's just a little bit special? Wait a second—I know." And his hand shot under the desk where it must have touched a hidden button, for a shallow drawer shot out from a place where there didn't seem to be room for one. He took from it a single fat file folder that had been stored flat and laid it on his knees.

Then he began to talk again in his reminiscing voice and damn if it wasn't so cool and knowing that it started to pull me back toward

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

the river of girls and set me thinking that this man wasn't really crazy, only extremely eccentric, maybe the eccentricity of genius, maybe he actually had hit on a hitherto unknown phenomenon depending on the more obscure properties of mind and matter, describing it to me in whimsically florid jargon, maybe he really had discovered something in one of the blind spots of modern science-and-psychology's picture of the universe.

"Stars, Carr. Female stars. Movie queens. Royal princesses of the gray world, the ghostly chiaroscuro. Shadow empresses. They're realer than people, Carr, realer than the great actresses or casting-couch champions they start as, for they're symbols, Carr, symbols of our deepest longings and—yes—most hidden fears and secretest dreams. Each decade has several who achieve this more-than-life and less-than-life existence, but there's generally one who's the chief symbol, the top ghost, the dream who lures men along toward fulfilment and destruction. In the Twenties it was Garbo, Garbo the Free Soul—that's my name for the symbol she became; her romantic mask heralded the Great Depression. In the late Thirties and early Forties it was Bergman the Brave Liberal; her dewiness and Swedish-Modern smile helped us accept World War Two. And now it's"—he touched the bulky folder on his knees—"now it's Evelyn Cordew the Good-Hearted Bait, the gal who accepts her troublesome sexiness with a resigned shrug and a foolish little laugh, and what general catastrophe she foreshadows we don't know yet. But here she is, and in five ghost versions. Pleased, Carr?"

I was so completely taken by surprise that I couldn't say anything for a moment. Either Slyker had guessed my real purpose in contacting him, or I was faced with a sizable coincidence. I wet my lips and then just nodded.

Slyker studied me and finally grinned. "Ah," he said, "takes you aback a bit, doesn't it? I perceive that in spite of your moderate sophistication you are one of the millions of males who have wistfully contemplated desert-islanding with Delectable Evvie. A complex cultural phenomenon, Eva-Lynn Korduplewski. The child of a coal miner, educated solely in backstreet movie houses—shaped by dreams, you see, into a master dream, an empress dream-figure. A hysteric, Carr, in fact the most classic example I have ever encountered, with unequaled mediumistic capacities and also with a hypertrophied and utterly ruthless ambition. Riddled by hypochondrias, but with more real drive than a million other avid schoolgirls tangled and trapped in the labyrinth of film ambitions. Dumb as they come, no rational mind at all, but with ten times Einstein's intuition — intuition enough, at

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

least, to realize that the symbol our sex-exploiting culture craved was a girl who accepted like a happy martyr the incandescent sexuality men and Nature forced on her—and with the patience and malleability to let the feathersoft beating of the black-and-white light in a cheap cinema shape her into that symbol. I sometimes think of her as a girl in a cheap dress standing on the shoulder of a big throughway, her eyes almost blinded by the lights of an approaching bus. The bus stops and she climbs on, dragging a pet goat and breathlessly giggling explanations at the driver. The bus is Civilization.

"Everybody knows her life story, which has been put out in a surprisingly accurate form up to a point: her burlesque-line days, the embarassingly faithful cartoon-series *Girl in a Fix* for which she posed, her bit parts, the amazingly timed success of the movies *Hydrogen Blonde* and *The Jean Harlow Saga,* her broken marriage to Jeff Crain—What was that, Carr? Oh, I thought you'd started to say something—and her hunger for the real stage and intellectual distinction and power. You can't imagine how hungry for brains and power that girl became *after* she hit the top.

"I've been part of the story of that hunger, Carr, and I pride myself that I've done more to satisfy it than all the culture-johnnies she's had on her payroll. Evelyn Cordew has learned a lot about herself right where you're sitting, and also threaded her way past two psychotic crack-ups. The trouble is that when her third loomed up she didn't come to me, she decided to put her trust in wheat germ and yogurt instead, so now she hates my guts—and perhaps her own, on that diet. She's made two attempts on my life, Carr, and had me trailed by gangsters . . . and by other individuals. She's talked about me to Jeff Crain, whom she still sees from time to time, and Jerry Smyslov and Nick De Grazia, telling them I've got a file of information on her burlesque days and a few of her later escapades, including some interesting photostats and the real dope on her income and her tax returns, and that I'm using it to blackmail her white. What she actually wants is her five ghosts back, and I can't give them to her because they might kill her. Yes, kill her, Carr." He flourished the shears for emphasis. "She claims that the ghosts I've taken from her have made her lose weight permanently—'look like a skeleton' are her words—and given her fits of mental blackout, a sort of psychic fading—whereas actually the ghosts have bled off from her a lot of malignant thoughts and destructive emotions, which could literally kill her (or someone!) if reabsorbed—they're drenched with death-wish. Still, I hear she actually does look a little haggard, a

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

trifle faded, in her last film, in spite of all Hollywood's medico-cosmetic lore, so maybe she has a sort of case against me. I haven't seen the film, I suppose you have. What do you think, Carr?"

I knew I'd been overworking the hesitation and the silent flattery, so I whipped out quickly, "I'd say it was due to her anemia. It seems to me that the anemia is quite enough to account for her loss of weight and her tired look."

"Ah! You've slipped, Carr," he lashed back, pointing at me triumphantly, except that instead of the outstretched finger there were those ridiculous, horrible shears. "Her anemia is one of the things that's been kept top-secret, known only to a very few of her intimates. Even in all the half-humorous releases about her hypochondrias that's one disease that has never been mentioned. I suspected you were from her when I got your note at the Countersign Club—the handwriting squirmed with tension and secrecy—but the *Justine* amused me—that was a fairly smart dodge—and your sorcerer's apprentice act amused me too, and I happened to feel like talking. But I've been studying you all along, especially your reactions to certain test-remarks I dropped in from time to time, and now you've really slipped." His voice was loud and clear, but he was shaking and giggling at the same time and his eyes showed white all the way around the irises. He drew back the shears a little, but clenched his fingers more tightly around them in a dagger grip, as he said with a chuckle, "Our dear little Evvie has sent all types up against me, to bargain for her ghosts or try to scare or assassinate me, but this is the first time she's sent an idealistic fool. Carr, why didn't you have the sense not to meddle?"

"Look here, Dr. Slyker," I countered before he started answering for me, "it's true I have a special purpose in contacting you. I never denied it. But I don't know anything about ghosts or gangsters. I'm here on a simple, businesslike assignment from the same guy who lent me the *Justine* and who has no purpose whatever beyond protecting Evelyn Cordew. I'm representing Jeff Crain."

That was supposed to calm him. Well, he did stop shaking and his eyes stopped wandering, but only because they were going over me like twin searchlights, and the giggle went out of his voice.

"Jeff Crain! Evvie just wants to murder me, but that cinematic Hemingway, that hulking guardian of hers, that human Saint Bernard tonguing the dry crumbs of their marriage—he wants to set the T-men on me, and the boys in blue and the boys in white too. Evvie's agents I mostly kid along, even the gangsters, but for Jeff's agents I have only one answer."

The silver shears pointed straight

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

at my chest and I could see his muscles tighten like a fat tiger's. I got ready for a spring of my own at the first movement this madman made toward me.

But the move he made was back across the desk with his free hand. I decided it was a good time to be on my feet in any case, but just as I sent my own muscles their orders I was hugged around the waist and clutched by the throat and grabbed by the wrists and ankles. By something soft but firm.

I looked down. Padded, broad, crescent-shaped clamps had sprung out of hidden traps in my chair and now held me as comfortably but firmly as a gang of competent orderlies. Even my hands were held by wide, velvet-soft cuffs that had snapped out of the bulbous arms. They were all a nondescript gray but even as I looked they began to change color to match my suit or skin, whichever they happened to border.

I wasn't scared. I was merely frightened half to death.

"Surprised, Carr? You shouldn't be." Slyker was sitting back like an amiable schoolteacher and gently wagging the shears as if they were a ruler. "Streamlined unobtrusiveness and remote control are the essence of our times, especially in medical furniture. The buttons on my desk can do more than that. Hypos might slip out—hardly hygienic, but then germs are overrated. Or electrodes for shock. You see, restraints are necessary in my business. Deep mediumistic trance can occasionally produce convulsions as violent as those of electroshock, especially when a ghost is cut. And I sometimes administer electroshock too, like any garden-variety headshrinker. Also, to be suddenly and firmly grabbed is a profound stimulus to the unconscious and often elicits closely-guarded facts from difficult patients. So a means of making my patients hold still is absolutely necessary — something swift, sure, tasteful and preferably without warning. You'd be surprised, Carr, at the situations in which I've been forced to activate those restraints. This time I prodded you to see just how dangerous you were. Rather to my surprise you showed yourself ready to take physical action against me. So I pushed the button. Now we'll be able to deal comfortably with Jeff Crain's problem ... and yours. But first I've a promise to keep to you. I said I would show you one of Evelyn Cordew's ghosts. It will take a little time and after a bit it will be necessary to turn out the lights."

"Dr. Slyker," I said as evenly as I could, "I—"

"Quiet! Activating a ghost for viewing involves certain risks. Silence is essential, though it will be necessary to use—very briefly—the suppressed Chaikovsky music which I turned off so quickly earlier this evening." He busied

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

himself with the hi fi for a few moments. "But partly because of that it will be necessary to put away all the other folders and the four ghosts of Evvie we aren't using, and lock the file drawers. Otherwise there might be complications."

I decided to try once more. "Before you go any further, Dr. Slyker," I began, "I would really like to explain—"

He didn't say another word, merely reached back across the desk again. My eyes caught something coming over my shoulder fast and the next instant it clapped down over my mouth and nose, not quite covering my eyes, but lapping up to them—something soft and dry and clinging and faintly crinkled feeling. I gasped and I could feel the gag sucking in, but not a bit of air came through it. That scared me seven-eighths of the rest of the way to oblivion, of course, and I froze. Then I tried a very cautious inhalation and a little air did seep through. It was wonderfully cool coming into the furnace of my lungs, that little suck of air—I felt I hadn't breathed for a week.

Slyker looked at me with a little smile. "I never say 'Quiet' twice, Carr. The foam plastic of that gag is another of Henri Artois' inventions. It consists of millions of tiny valves. As long as you breathe softly — very, very softly, Carr — they permit ample air to pass, but if you gasp or try to shout through it, they'll close up tight. A wonderfully soothing device. Compose yourself, Carr; your life depends on it."

I have never experienced such utter helplessness. I found that the slightest muscular tension, even crooking a finger, made my breathing irregular enough so that the valves started to close and I was in the fringes of suffocation. I could see and hear what was going on, but I dared not react, I hardly dared think. I had to pretend that most of my body wasn't there (the chameleon plastic helped!), only a pair of lungs working constantly but with infinite caution.

Slyker had just set the Cordew folder back in its drawer, without closing it, and started to gather up the other scattered folders, when he touched the desk again and the lights went out. I have mentioned that the place was completely sealed against light. The darkness was complete.

"Don't be alarmed, Carr," Slyker's voice came chuckling through it. "In fact, as I am sure you realize, you had better not be. I can tidy up just as handily—working by touch is one of my major skills, my sight and hearing being rather worse than appears—and even your eyes must be fully accommodated if you're to see anything at all. I repeat, don't be alarmed, Carr, least of all by ghosts."

I would never have expected it, but in spite of the spot I was in

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

(which actually did seem to have its soothing effects), I still got a little kick—a very little one—out of thinking I was going to see some sort of secret vision of Evelyn Cordew, real in some sense or faked by a master faker. Yet at the same time, and I think beyond all my fear for myself, I felt a dispassionate disgust at the way Slyker reduced all human drives and desires to a lust for power, of which the chair imprisoning me, the "Siegfried Line" door, and the files of ghosts, real or imagined, were perfect symbols.

Among immediate worries, although I did a pretty good job of suppressing all of them, the one that nagged at me the most was that Slyker had admitted to me the inadequacy of his two major senses. I didn't think he would make that admission to someone who was going to live very long.

The black minutes dragged on. I heard from time to time the rustle of folders, but only one soft thud of a file drawer closing, so I knew he wasn't finished yet with the putting-away and locking-up job.

I concentrated the free corner of my mind—the tiny part I dared spare from breathing—on trying to hear something else, but I couldn't even catch the background noise of the city. I decided the office must be soundproofed as well as light-sealed. Not that it mattered, since I couldn't get a signal out anyway.

Then a noise did come—a solid snap that I'd heard just once before, but knew instantly. It was the sound of the bolts in the office door retracting. There was something funny about it that took me a moment to figure out: there had been no preliminary grating of the key.

For a moment too I thought Slyker had crept noiselessly to the door, but then I realized that the rustling of folders at the desk had kept up all the time.

And the rustling of folders continued. I guessed Slyker had not noticed the door. He hadn't been exaggerating about his bad hearing.

There was the faint creaking of the hinges, once, twice—as if the door were being opened and closed—then again the solid snap of the bolts. That puzzled me, for there should have been a big flash of light from the corridor—unless the lights were all out.

I couldn't hear any sound after that, except the continued rustling of the file folders, though I listened as hard as the job of breathing let me—and in a crazy kind of way the job of cautious breathing helped my hearing, because it made me hold absolutely still yet without daring to tense up. I knew that someone was in the office with us and that Slyker didn't know it. The black moments seemed to stretch out forever, as if an edge of eternity had got hooked into our time-stream.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

All of a sudden there was a *swish,* like that of a sheet being whipped through the air very fast, and a grunt of surprise from Slyker that started toward a screech and then was cut off as sharp as if he'd been gagged nose-and-mouth like me. Then there came the scuff of feet and the squeal of the castors of a chair, the sound of a struggle, not of two people struggling, but of a man struggling against restraints of some sort, a frantic confined heaving and panting. I wondered if Slyker's little lump of chair had sprouted restraints like mine, but that hardly made sense.

Then abruptly there was the whistle of breath, as if his nostrils had been uncovered, but not his mouth. He was panting through his nose. I got a mental picture of Slyker tied to his chair some way and eying the darkness just as I was doing.

Finally out of the darkness came a voice I knew very well because I'd heard it often enough in movie houses and from Jeff Crain's tape-recorder. It had the old familiar caress mixed with the old familiar giggle, the naïveté and the knowingness, the warm sympathy and cool-headedness, the high-school charmer and the sybil. It was Evelyn Cordew's voice, all right.

"Oh for goodness sake stop threshing around, Emmy. It won't help you shake off that sheet and it makes you look so funny. Yes, I said 'look,' Emmy—you'd be surprised at how losing five ghosts improves your eyesight, like having veils taken away from in front of them; you get more sensitive all over.

"And don't try to appeal to me by pretending to suffocate. I tucked the sheet under your nose even if I did keep your mouth covered. Couldn't bear you talking now. The sheet's called wraparound plastic — I've got my chemical friend too, though he's not Parisian. It'll be next year's number-one packaging material, he tells me. Filmy, harder to see than cellophane, but very tough. An electronic plastic, no less, positive one side, negative the other. Just touch it to something and it wraps around, touches itself, and clings like anything. Like I just had to touch it to you. To make it unwrap fast you can just shoot some electrons into it from a handy static battery — my friend's advertising copy, Emmy—and it flattens out *whang.* Give it enough electrons and it's stronger than steel.

"We used another bit of it that last way, Emmy, to get through your door. Fitted it outside, so it'd wrap itself against the bolts when your door opened. Then just now, after blacking out the corridor, we pumped electrons into it and it flattened out, pushing back all the bolts. Excuse me, dear, but you know how you love to lecture about your valved plastics and all your other little restraints, so you

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

mustn't mind me giving a little talk about mine. And boasting about my friends too. I've got some you don't know about, Emmy. Ever heard the name Smyslov, or the Arain? Some of them cut ghosts themselves and weren't pleased to hear about you, especially the past-future angle."

There was a protesting little squeal of castors, as if Slyker were trying to move his chair.

"Don't go away, Emmy. I'm sure you know why I'm here. Yes, dear, I'm taking them all back as of now. All five. And I don't care how much death-wish they got, because I've got some ideas for that. So now 'scuse me, Emmy, while I get ready to slip into my ghosts."

There wasn't any noise then except Emil Slyker's wheezy breathing and the occasional rustle of silk and the whir of a zipper, followed by soft feathery falls.

"There we are, Emmy, all clear. Next step, my five lost sisters. Why, your little old secret drawer is open—you didn't think I knew about that, Emmy, did you? Let's see now, I don't think we'll need music for this — they know my touch; it should make them stand up and shine."

She stopped talking. After a bit I got the barest hint of light over by the desk, very uncertain at first, like a star at the limit of vision, where it keeps winking back and forth from utter absence to the barest dim existence, or like a lonely lake lit only by starlight and glimpsed through a thick forest, or as if those dancing points of light that persist even in absolute darkness and indicate only a restless retina and optic nerve had fooled me for a moment into thinking they represented something real.

But then the hint of light took definite form, though staying at the dim limit of vision and crawling back and forth as I focused on it because my eyes had no other point of reference to steady it by.

It was a dim angular band making up three edges of a rectangle, the top edge longer than the two vertical edges, while the bottom edge wasn't there. As I watched it and it became a little clearer, I saw that the bands of light were brightest toward the inside—that is, toward the rectangle they partly enclosed, where they were bordered by stark blackness—while toward the outside they faded gradually away. Then as I continued to watch I saw that the two corners were rounded while up from the top edge there projected a narrow, lesser rectangle—a small tab.

The tab made me realize that I was looking at a file folder silhouetted by something dimly glowing inside it.

Then the top band darkened toward the center, as would happen if a hand were dipping into the folder, and then lightened again as if the hand were being

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

withdrawn. Then up out of the folder, as if the invisible hand were guiding or coaxing it, swam something no brighter than the bands of light.

It was the shape of a woman, but distorted and constantly flowing, the head and arms and upper torso maintaining more of an approximation to human proportions than the lower torso and legs, which were like churning, trailing draperies or a long gauzy skirt. It was extremely dim, so I had to keep blinking my eyes, and it didn't get brighter.

It was like the figure of a woman phosphorescently painted on a long-skirted slip of the filmiest silk that had silk-stocking-like sheathes for arms and head attached—yes, and topped by some illusion of dim silver hair. And yet it was more than that. Although it looped up gracefully through the air as such a slip might when shaken out by a woman preparing to put it on, it also had a writhing life of its own.

But in spite of all the distortions, as it flowed in an arc toward the ceiling and dove downward, it was seductively beautiful and the face was recognizably that of Evie Cordew.

It checked its dive and reversed the direction of its flow, so that for a moment it floated upright high in the air, like a filmy nightgown a woman swishes above her head before she slips into it.

Then it began to settle toward the floor and I saw that there really was a woman standing under it and pulling it down over her head, though I could see her body only very dimly by the reflected glow of the ghost she was drawing down around her.

The woman on the floor shot up her hands close to her body and gave a quick wriggle and twist and ducked her head and then threw it back, as a woman does when she's getting into a tight dress, and the flowing glowing thing lost its distortions as it fitted itself around her.

Then for a moment the glow brightened a trifle as the woman and her ghost merged and I saw Evvie Cordew with her flesh gleaming by its own light—the long slim ankles, the vase-curve of hips and waist, the impudent breasts almost as you'd guess them from the Bikini shots, but with larger aureoles—saw it for an instant before the ghost-light winked out like white sparks dying, and there was utter darkness again.

Utter darkness and a voice that crooned, "Oh that was like silk, Emmy, pure silk stocking all over. Do you remember when you cut it, Emmy? I'd just got my first screen credit and I'd signed the seven-year contract and I knew I was going to have the world by the tail and I felt wonderful and I suddenly got terribly dizzy for no reason and I came to you. And you straightened me out for then by coaxing out

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

and cutting away my happiness. You told me it would be a little like giving blood, and it was. That was my first ghost, Emmy, but only the first."

My eyes, recovering swiftly from the brighter glow of the ghost returning to its sources, again made out the three glowing sides of the file folder. And again there swam up out of it a crazily churning phosphorescent woman trailing gauzy streamers. The face was recognizably Evvie's, but constantly distorting, now one eye big as an orange then small as a pea, the lips twisting in impossible smiles and grimaces, the brow shrinking to that of a pinhead or swelling to that of a mongolian idiot, like a face reflected from a plate-glass window running with water. As it came down over the real Evelyn's face there was a moment when the two were together but didn't merge, like the faces of twins in such a flooded window. Then, as if a squeegee had been wiped down it, the single face came bright and clear, and just as the darkness returned she caressed her lips with her tongue.

And I heard her say, "That one was like hot velvet, Emmy, smooth but with a burn in it. You took it two days after the sneak preview of *Hydrogen Blonde,* when we had the little party to celebrate after the big party, and the current Miss America was there and I showed her what a really valuable body looked like. That was when I realized that I'd hit the top and it hadn't changed me into a goddess or anything. I still had the same ignorances as before and the same awkwardnesses for the cameramen and cutters to hide—only they were worse because I was in the center of the show window—and I was going to have to fight for the rest of my life to keep my body like it was and then I was going to start to die, wrinkle by wrinkle, lose my juice cell by cell, like anybody else."

The third ghost arched toward the ceiling and down, waves of phosphorescence flickering it all the time. The slender arms undulated like pale serpents and the hands, the finger- and thumb-tips gently pressed together, were like the inquisitive heads of serpents—until the fingers spread so the hands resembled five-tongued creeping puddles of phosphorescent ink. Then into them as if into shoulder-length ivory silk gloves came the solid fingers and arms. For a bit the hands, first part to be merged, were brightest of the whole figure and I watched them help fit each other on and then sweep symmetrically down brow and cheeks and chin, fitting the face, with a little sidewise dip of the ring fingers as they smoothed in the eyes. Then they swept up and back and raked through both heads of hair, mixing them. This ghost's hair was very dark and, mingling, it toned down Evelyn's blonde a little.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

"That one felt slimy, Emmy, like the top crawled off of a swamp. Remember, I'd just teased the boys into fighting over me at the Troc. Jeff hurt Lester worse than they let out and even old Sammy got a black eye. I'd just discovered that when you get to the top you have all the ordinary pleasures the boobs yearn for all their lives, and they don't mean anything, and you have to work and scheme every minute to get the pleasures beyond pleasure that you've got to have to keep your life from going dry."

The fourth ghost rose toward the ceiling like a diver paddling up from the depths. Then, as if the whole room were filled with its kind of water, it seemed to surface at the ceiling and jacknife there and plunge down again with a little swoop and then reverse direction again and hover for a moment over the real Evelyn's head and then sink slowly down around her like a diver drowning. This time I watched the bright hands cupping the ghost's breasts around her own as if she were putting on a luminescent net brassiere. Then the ghost's filminess shrank suddenly to tighten over her torso like a cheap cotton dress in a cloudburst.

As the glow died to darkness a fourth time, Evelyn said softly, "Ah but that was cool, Emmy. I'm shivering. I'd just come back from my first location work in Europe and was sick to get at Broadway, and before you cut it you made me relive the yacht party where I overheard Ricco and the author laughing at how I'd messed up my first legitimate play reading, and we swam in the moonlight and Monica almost drowned. That was when I realized that nobody, even the bottom boobs in the audience, really respected you because you were their sex queen. They respected the little female boob in the seat beside them more than they did you. Because you were just something on the screen that they could handle as they pleased inside their minds. With the top folk, the Big Timers, it wasn't any better. To them you were just a challenge, a prize, something to show off to other men to drive them nuts, but never something to love. Well, that's four, Emmy, and four and one makes all."

The last ghost rose whirling and billowing like a silk robe in the wind, like a crazy photomontage, like a surrealist painting done in a barely visible wash of pale flesh tones on a black canvas, or rather like an endless series of such surrealist paintings, each distortion melting into the next—trailing behind it a gauzy wake of draperies which I realized was the way ghosts were always pictured and described. I watched the draperies bunch as Evelyn pulled them down around her, and then they suddenly whipped tight against her thighs, like a skirt in a strong wind or

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

like nylon clinging in the cold. The final glow was a little stronger, as if there were more life in the shining woman than there had been at first.

"Ah that was like the brush of wings, Emmy, like feathers in the wind. You cut it after the party in Sammy's plane to celebrate me being the top money star in the industry. I bothered the pilot because I wanted him to smash us in a dive. That was when I realized I was just property—something for men to make money out of (and me to make money, too, out of me) from the star who married me to prop his box-office rating to the sticks theater owner who hoped I'd sell a few extra tickets. I found that my deepest love—it was once for you, Emmy—was just something for a man to capitalize on. That any man, no matter how sweet or strong, could in the end never be anything but a pimp. Like you, Emmy."

Just darkness for a while then, darkness and silence, broken only by the faint rustling of clothing.

Finally her voice again: "So now I got my pictures back, Emmy. All the original negatives, you might say, for you can't make prints of them or second negatives—I don't think. Or is there a way of making prints of them, Emmy—duplicate women? It's not worth letting you answer—you'd be bound to say yes to scare me.

"What do we do with you now, Emmy? I know what you'd do to me if you had the chance, for you've done it already. You've kept parts of me—no, five real *me's*—tucked away in envelopes for a long time, something to take out and look at or run through your hand or twist around a finger or crumple in a ball, whenever you felt bored on a long afternoon or an endless night. Or maybe show off to special friends or even give other girls to wear—you didn't think I knew about that trick, did you, Emmy?—I hope I poisoned them, I hope I made them burn! Remember, Emmy, I'm full of death-wish now, five ghosts of it. Yes, Emmy, what do we do with you now?"

Then, for the first time since the ghosts had shown, I heard the sound of Dr. Slyker's breath whistling through his nose and the muffled grunts and creakings as he lurched against the clinging sheet.

"Makes you think, doesn't it, Emmy? I wish I'd asked my ghosts what to do with you when I had the chance—I wish I'd known how to ask them. They'd have been the ones to decide. Now they're too mixed in.

"We'll let the other girls decide —the other ghosts. How many dozen are there, Emmy? How many hundred? I'll trust their judgment. Do your ghosts love you, Emmy?"

I heard the click of her heels followed by soft rushes ending in

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

thuds — the file drawers being yanked open. Slyker got noisier.

"You don't think they love you, Emmy? Or they do but their way of showing affection won't be exactly comfortable, or safe? We'll see."

The heels clicked again for a few steps.

"And now, music. The fourth button, Emmy?"

There came again those sensual, spectral chords that opened the "Ghostgirls Pavan," and this time they led gradually into a music that seemed to twirl and spin, very slowly and with a lazy grace, the music of space, the music of tree fall. It made easier the slow breathing that meant life to me.

I became aware of dim fountains. Each file drawer was outlined by a phosphorescent glow shooting upward.

Over the edge of one drawer a pale hand flowed. It slipped back, but there was another, and another.

The music strengthened, though spinning still more lazily, and out of the phosphorescence-edged parallelogram of the file drawers there began to pour, swiftly now, pale streams of womankind. Ever-changing faces that were gossamer masks of madness, drunkenness, desire and hate; arms like a flood of serpents; bodies that writhed, convulsed, yet flowed like milk by moonlight.

They swirled out in a circle like slender clouds in a ring, a spinning circle that dipped close to me, inquisitively, a hundred strangely slitted eyes seeming to peer.

The spinning forms brightened. By their light I began to see Dr. Slyker, the lower part of his face tight with the transparent plastic, only the nostrils flaring and the bulging eyes switching their gaze about, his arms tight to his sides.

The first spiral of the ring speeded up and began to tighten around his head and neck. He was beginning to twirl slowly on his tiny chair, as if he were a fly caught in the middle of a web and being spun in a cocoon by the spider. His face was alternately obscured and illuminated by the bright smoky forms swinging past it. It looked as if he was being strangled by his own cigarette smoke in a film run backwards.

His face began to darken as the glowing circle tightened against him.

Once more there was utter darkness.

Then a whirring click and a tiny shower of sparks, three times repeated, then a tiny blue flame. It moved and stopped and moved, leaving behind it more silent tiny flames, yellow ones. They grew. Evelyn was systematically setting fire to the files.

I knew it might be curtains for me, but I shouted—it came out as a kind of hiccup—and my breath was instantly cut off as the valves in the gag closed.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

But Evelyn turned. She had been bending close over Emil's chest and the light from the growing flames highlighted her smile. Through the dark red mist that was closing in on my vision I saw the flames begin to leap from one drawer after another. There was a sudden low roar, like film or acetate shavings burning.

Suddenly Evelyn reached across the desk and touched a button. As I started to red out, I realized that the gag was off, the clamps were loose.

I floundered to my feet, pain stabbing my numbed muscles. The room was full of flickering brightness under a dirty cloud bulging from the ceiling. Evelyn had jerked the transparent sheet off Slyker and was crumpling it up. He started to fall forward, very slowly. Looking at me she said, "Tell Jeff he's dead." But before Slyker hit the floor, she was out the door. I took a step toward Slyker, felt the stinging heat of the flames. My legs were like shaky stilts as I made for the door. As I steadied myself on the jamb I took a last look back, then lurched on.

There wasn't a light in the corridor. The glow of the flames behind me helped a little.

The top of the elevator was dropping out of sight as I reached the shaft. I took the stairs. It was a painful descent. As I trotted out of the building—it was the best speed I could manage — I heard sirens coming. Evelyn must have put in a call—or one of her "friends," though not even Jeff Crain was able to tell me more about them: who her chemist was and who were the Arain—it's an old word for spider, but that leads nowhere. I don't even know how she knew I was working for Jeff; Evelyn Cordew is harder than ever to see and I haven't tried. I don't believe even Jeff's seen her; though I've sometimes wondered if I wasn't used as a cat's paw.

I'm keeping out of it—just as I left it to the firemen to discover Dr. Emil Slyker "suffocated by smoke" from a fire in his "weird" private office, a fire which it was reported did little more than char the furniture and burn the contents of his files and the tapes of his hi fi.

I think a little more was burned. When I looked back the last time I saw the Doctor lying in a strait jacket of pale flames. It may have been scattered papers or the electronic plastic. I think it was ghost-girls burning.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

The only excuse that American publishers can offer for not bringing out a volume of Brian Aldiss' short stories, already collected in England, is that every month of delay means a richer crop to choose from. For this young Englishman keeps getting even better, as he exhibits (especially in this newest story) a sheer zest for writing hardly matched in our field since the early days of Ray Bradbury.

Poor Little Warrior!

by BRIAN W. ALDISS

CLAUDE FORD KNEW EXACTLY HOW it was to hunt a brontosaurus. You crawled heedlessly through the mud among the willows, through the little primitive flowers with petals as green and brown as a football field, through the beauty-lotion mud. You peered out at the creature sprawling among the reeds, its body as graceful as a sock full of sand. There it lay, letting the gravity cuddle it nappy-damp to the marsh, running its big rabbit-hole nostrils a foot above the grass in a sweeping semicircle, in a snoring search for more sausagy reeds. It was beautiful: here horror had reached its limits, come full circle and finally disappeared up its own sphincter. Its eyes gleamed with the liveliness of a week-dead corpse's big toe, and its compost breath and the fur in its crude aural cavities were particularly to be recommended to anyone who might otherwise have felt inclined to speak lovingly of the work of Mother Nature.

But as you, little mammal with opposed digit and .65 self-loading, semi-automatic, dual-barrelled, digitally-computed, telescopically sighted, rustless, high-powered rifle gripped in your otherwise-defenceless paws, snide along under the bygone willows, what primarily attracts you is the thunder lizard's hide. It gives off a smell as deeply resonant as the bass note of a piano. It makes the elephant's epidermis look like a sheet of crinkled lavatory paper. It is gray as the Viking seas, daft-deep as cathedral foundations. What contact possible to bone could allay the fever of that flesh? Over it scamper—you can see them from here!—the little brown lice that live in those gray

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

walls and canyons, gay as ghosts, cruel as crabs. If one of them jumped on you, it would very like break your back. And when one of those parasites stops to cock its leg against one of the bronto's vertebrae, you can see it carries in its turn its own crop of easy-livers, each as big as a lobster, for you're near now, oh, so near that you can hear the monster's primitive heart-organ knocking, as the ventricle keeps miraculous time with the auricle.

Time for listening to the oracle is past: you're beyond the stage for omens, you're now headed in for the kill, yours or his; superstition has had its little day for today, from now on only this windy nerve of yours, this shaky conglomeration of muscle entangled untraceably beneath the sweat-shiny carapace of skin, this bloody little urge to slay the dragon, is going to answer all your orisons.

You could shoot now. Just wait till that tiny steam-shovel head pauses once again to gulp down a quarry-load of bullrushes, and with one inexpressibly vulgar bang you can show the whole indifferent Jurassic world that it's standing looking down the business end of evolution's sex-shooter. You know why you pause, even as you pretend not to know why you pause; that old worm conscience, long as a baseball pitch, long-lived as a tortoise, is at work; through every sense it slides, more monstrous than the serpent. Through the passions: saying here is a sitting duck, O Englishman! Through the intelligence: whispering that boredom, the kite-hawk who never feeds, will settle again when the task is done. Through the nerves: sneering that when the adrenalin currents cease to flow the vomiting begins. Through the maestro behind the retina: plausibly forcing the beauty of the view upon you.

Spare us that poor old slipper-slopper of a word, *beauty;* holy mom, is this a travelogue, nor are we out of it? *"Perched now on this titanic creature's back, we see a round dozen—and folks let me stress that round—of gaudily plumaged birds, exhibiting between them all the colour you might expect to find on lovely, fabled Copacabana Beach. They're so round because they feed from the droppings that fall from the rich man's table. Watch this lovely shot now! See the bronto's tail lift. . . . Oh, lovely, yep, a couple of hayricksfull at least emerging from his nether end. That sure was a beauty, folks, delivered straight from consumer to consumer. The birds are fighting over it now. Hey, you, there's enough to go round, and anyhow, you're round enough already. . . . And nothing to do now but hop back up onto the old rump steak and wait for the next round. And now as the sun sinks in the Jurassic West, we say 'Fare well on that diet'. . ."*

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

No, you're procrastinating, and that's a life work. Shoot the beast and put it out of your agony. Taking your courage in your hands, you raise it to shoulder level and squint down its sights. There is a terrible report; you are half stunned. Shakily, you look about you. The monster still munches, relieved to have broken enough wind to unbecalm the Ancient Mariner.

Angered (or is it some subtler emotion?), you now burst from the bushes and confront it, and this exposed condition is typical of the straits into which your consideration for yourself and others continually pitches you. Consideration? Or again something subtler? Why should you be confused just because you come from a confused civilisation? But that's a point to deal with later, if there is a later, as these two hog-wallow eyes pupilling you all over from spitting distance tend to dispute. Let it not be by jaws alone, O monster, but also by huge hooves and, if convenient to yourself, by mountainous rollings upon me! Let death be a saga, sagacious, Beowulfate.

Quarter of a mile distant is the sound of a dozen hippos springing boisterously in gymslips from the ancestral mud, and next second a walloping great tail as long as Sunday and as thick as Saturday night comes slicing over your head. You duck as duck you must, but the beast missed you anyway because it so happens that its coordination is no better than yours would be if you had to wave the Woolworth Building at a tarsier. This done, it seems to feel it has done its duty by itself. It forgets you. You just wish you could forget yourself as easily; that was, after all, the reason you had to come the long way here. *Get Away From It All,* said the time travel brochure, which meant for you getting away from Claude Ford, a husbandman as futile as his name with a terrible wife called Maude. Maude and Claude Ford. Who could not adjust to themselves, to each other, or to the world they were born in. It was the best reason in the as-it-is-at-present-constituted world for coming back here to shoot giant saurians—if you were fool enough to think that one hundred and fifty million years either way made an ounce of difference to the muddle of thoughts in a man's cerebral vortex.

You try and stop your silly, slobbering thoughts, but they have never really stopped since the coca-collaborating days of your growing up; God, if adolescence did not exist it would be unnecessary to invent it! Slightly, it steadies you to look again on the enormous bulk of this tyrant vegetarian into whose presence you charged with such a mixed death-life wish, charged with all the emotion the human orga-(ni)sm is capable of. This time the bogeyman is real, Claude, just as you wanted it to be, and this time

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

you really have to face up to it before it turns and faces you again. And so again you lift Ole Equaliser, waiting till you can spot the vulnerable spot.

The bright birds sway, the lice scamper like dogs, the marsh groans, as bronto sways over and sends his little cranium snaking down under the bile-bright water in a forage for roughage. You watch this; you have never been so jittery before in all your jittered life, and you are counting on this catharsis wringing the last drop of acid fear out of your system for ever. OK, you keep saying to yourself insanely over and over, your million-dollar twenty-second-century education going for nothing, OK, OK. And as you say it for the umpteenth time, the crazy head comes back out of the water like a renegade express and gazes in your direction.

Grazes in your direction. For as the champing jaw with its big blunt molars like concrete posts works up and down, you see the swamp water course out over rimless lips, lipless rims, splashing your feet and sousing the ground. Reed and root, stalk and stem, leaf and loam, all are intermittently visible in that masticating maw and, struggling, straggling or tossed among them, minnows, tiny crustaceans, frogs—all destined in that awful, jaw-full movement to turn into bowel movement. And as the glump-glump-glumping takes place, above it the slime-resistant eyes again survey you.

These beasts live up to two hundred years, says the time travel brochure, and this beast has obviously tried to live up to that, for its gaze is centuries old, full of decades upon decades of wallowing in its heavyweight thoughtlessness until it has grown wise on twitterpatedness. For you it is like looking into a disturbing misty pool; it gives you a psychic shock, you fire off both barrels at your own reflection. Bang-bang, the dum-dums, big as paw-paws, go.

With no indecision, those century-old lights, dim and sacred, go out. These cloisters are closed till Judgment Day. Your reflection is torn and bloodied from them for ever. Over their ravaged panes nictitating membranes slide slowly upwards, like dirty sheets covering a cadaver. The jaw continues to munch slowly, as slowly the head sinks down. Slowly, a squeeze of cold reptile blood toothpastes down the wrinkled flank of one cheek. Everything is slow, a creepy Secondiary Era slowness like the drip of water, and you know that if you had been in charge of creation you would have found some medium less heart-breaking than Time to stage it all in.

Never mind! Quaff down your beakers, lords, Claude Ford has slain a harmless creature. Long live Claude the Clawed!

You watch breathless as the head

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

touches the ground, the long laugh of neck touches the ground, the jaws close for good. You watch and wait for something else to happen, but nothing ever does. Nothing ever would. You could stand here watching for an hundred and fifty million years, Lord Claude, and nothing would ever happen here again. Gradually your bronto's mighty carcass, picked loving clean by predators, would sink into the slime, carried by its own weight deeper; then the waters would rise, and old Conqueror Sea come in with the leisurely air of a card-sharp dealing the boys a bad hand. Silt and sediment would filter down over the mighty grave, a slow rain with centuries to rain in. Old bronto's bed might be raised up and then down again perhaps half a dozen times, gently enough not to disturb him, although by now the sedimentary rocks would be forming thick around him. Finally, when he was wrapped in a tomb finer than any Indian rajah ever boasted, the powers of the Earth would raise him high on their shoulders until, sleeping still, bronto would lie in a brow of the Rockies high above the waters of the Pacific. But little any of that would count with you, Claude the Sword; once the midget maggot of life is dead in the creature's skull, the rest is no concern of yours.

You have no emotion now. You are just faintly put out. You expected dramatic thrashing of the ground, or bellowing; on the other hand, you are glad the thing did not appear to suffer. You are like all cruel men, sentimental; you are like all sentimental men, squeamish. You tuck the gun under your arm and walk round the dinosaur to view your victory.

You prowl past the ungainly hooves, round the septic white of the cliff of belly, beyond the glistening and how-thought-provoking cavern of the cloaca, finally posing beneath the switch-back sweep of tail-to-rump. Now your disappointment is as crisp and obvious as a visiting card: the giant is not half as big as you thought it was. It is not one half as large, for example, as the image of you and Maude is in your mind. Poor little warrior, science will never invent anything to assist the titanic death you want in the contraterrene caverns of your fee-fi-fo fumblingly fearful id!

Nothing is left to you now but to slink back to your timemobile with a belly full of anticlimax. See, the bright dung-consuming birds have already cottoned on to the true state of affairs; one by one, they gather up their hunched wings and fly disconsolately off across the swamp to other hosts. They know when a good thing turns bad, and do not wait for the vultures to drive them off; all hope abandon, ye who entrail here. You also turn away.

You turn, but you pause. Nothing is left but to go back, no, but

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

2181 A.D. is not just the home date; it is Maude. It is Claude. It is the whole awful, hopeless, endless business of trying to adjust to an overcomplex environment, of trying to turn yourself into a cog. Your escape from it into *the Grand Simplicities of the Jurassic,* to quote the brochure again, was only a partial escape, now over.

So you pause, and as you pause, something lands socko on your back, pitching you face forward into tasty mud. You struggle and scream as lobster claws tear at your neck and throat. You try to pick up the rifle but cannot, so in agony you roll over, and next second the crab-thing is greedying it on your chest. You wrench at its shell, but it giggles and pecks your fingers off. You forgot when you killed the bronto that its parasites would leave it, and that to a little shrimp like you they would be a deal more dangerous than their host.

You do your best, kicking for at least three minutes. By the end of that time there is a whole pack of the creatures on you. Already they are picking your carcass loving clean. You're going to like it up there on top of the Rockies; you won't feel a thing.

WE'D LIKE TO SUGGEST...

If you enjoy The Magazine of Fantasy and Science Fiction, you will enjoy some of the other fine Mercury Publications, now on sale:

- **VENTURE**—*Top-flight action-and-adventure science fiction. In the May issue, read Theodore Sturgeon's powerful novelet, "The Comedian's Children." Other top stories by Gordon R. Dickson, Rog Phillips, and many others, plus Isaac Asimov's column on science.*
- **MERCURY MYSTERY BOOK-MAGAZINE**—*George Bagby's murder puzzler, "The Three-Time Losers," is the featured novel in April. Plus articles by Erle Stanley Gardner, Miriam Allen deFord, and entertaining thrillers by Walt Sheldon, Joseph Zaitchik and others.*
- **BESTSELLER MYSTERY No. 209**—*"Bridge to Vengeance" (formerly titled "The Little Walls") by Winston Graham. "... a superior suspense item," says the N. Y.* Times *of this tale of a search for a killer that ends in danger—and romance.*

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

CLIFTON FADIMAN, writer and editor, judge of the Book-of-the-Month Club, writes: *"Each of us has his own special escape-reading. Mine is science fiction. To my mind Fantasy and Science Fiction regularly supplies the finest the field has to offer in the way of short fiction."*

SPRING BYINGTON, famous star of the Broadway stage and motion pictures, now starring in the CBS TV show "December Bride," writes: *"If your imagination is sedentary, getting stiff, inelastic, arthritic, it needs exercise. For this I prescribe one issue a month of Fantasy and Science Fiction. Improvement will be noted after the first dose."*

BASIL DAVENPORT, writer and editor, judge of the Book-of-the-Month Club, writes: *"I have been a fan of science fiction all my life, and of The Magazine of Fantasy and Science Fiction for all its life. F&SF gives us some of the best writing in the field, and the field is one of great importance."*

HUGO GERNSBACK, pioneer in science fiction publishing, writer and editor, writes: *"Plus ça change, plus c'est la même chose—is a French truism, lamentably accurate of much of our latter day science fiction. Not so in the cyclotronic Magazine of Fantasy and Science Fiction which injects sophisticated isotopes, pregnant with imagination, into many of its best narratives."*

ORVILLE PRESCOTT, literary critic and author, Book Review Editor for the *New York Times, writes: "People who think that their literary I.Q. is too high for them to enjoy the Magazine of Fantasy and Science Fiction don't know what they are missing. The number of well-written, ingenious and entertaining stories it regularly publishes is astonishingly high."*

BEN GRAUER, radio and television outstanding special events reporter: *"Science fiction, I think, offers a wonderful education for its readers—it extends their understanding to include the entire cosmos."*

PEOPLE WITH

IMAGINATION

READ THE MAGAZINE OF

FANTASY AND SCIENCE FICTION

Stars of the entertainment world . . . notables in the news . . . distinguished authors and editors —all owe much of their success to imagination. So when they want relaxation or stimulation in reading, they turn naturally to the finest works of imagination; tales of science fiction. And they find such stories—exciting, fast-paced and exceedingly well written—in THE MAGAZINE OF FANTASY AND SCIENCE FICTION. Here they find current top-notchers such as Robert Heinlein, Arthur C. Clarke, Theodore Sturgeon and Isaac Asimov; plus unexpected fantasies from writers famous in other fields, such as Stuart Palmer and Mark Van Doren. As a bonus, F&SF has a unique record of finding stimulating new talents—such fine writers as Mildred Clingerman, Richard Matheson and Chad Oliver first appeared in these pages. . . . In a word, here is the best of fantasy and science fiction.

35¢ at better newsstands every month

By subscription $4 a year

527 MADISON AVENUE NEW YORK 22, N

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED